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FETTERED FOR LIFE

A Novel

BY

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'FOLLY MORRISON,' 'LADY BIDDY FANE,' 'HONEST DAVIE,' ETC.

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FETTERED FOR LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

LIKE A THIEF.

A CLOCK was striking eleven as I stood still to listen on Richmond Hill. I was too early by an hour. There was time for a rest before going any further, and I needed it. From Old Street Road, Shoreditch, to Richmond, is not much of a walk for a young man of twenty, in good condition; but when a man's heart is heavy, and he has eaten nothing since mid-day (and then but bread and cheese), a march like that late at night makes him shaky at the knees and sick. I sat down on one of the benches under the elms on the terrace

there overlooking the river. The moon was not to be seen, but its light was diffused in the white, woolly mist that hung in the still air. The fallen leaves were covered with moisture; heavy drops from the boughs above plashed down now and then as if it had been raining recently. The gas burnt sluggishly in the lamp hard by, the mist forming a halo about it. I remember noticing these things, for my mind was in a condition to receive the impression of trifles—like the earth after a fall of snow.

It was chill as well as damp. I felt it, sitting there still after the warmth of walking. I turned my collar up and hunched my shoulders, sticking my hands deep in my pockets. The policeman on the raised causeway behind might well pause to look down and speculate upon the kind of man I was, and the reason of my coming here to sit in the humid fog at such an hour. After glancing

behind me to know whose heavy step had stopped, I settled my ears down in my collar again. It *was* cold. 'Never mind; it's better to put up with a shiver than to walk about and grow sick with fatigue,' thought I. So I sat there, watching the drops run zigzag, by fits and starts, down the glass of the lamp, as they flowed from a touching spray of elm, till the policeman, having rounded the corner and come along the terrace, stopped in front of me, planted his thumbs in his belt, gave me a nod, and spoke.

'Well, old man! got the key of the street?' he asked.

I did not then know the meaning of the phrase, but I answered, 'No,' briefly, feeling disinclined to meet his familiar approaches.

'Out o' collar?' he asked, in the cheerful, high-pitched tone of conscious superiority.

'No,' I answered as before.

'Going to stay here all night?'

'No.'

'Why, you're all nose, like a poll parrot,' said he, with a laugh at his own miserable witticism. 'Ain't you got nothin' else to say? What are you thinkin' about?'

'I'm thinking,' said I, 'that if I wore a decent suit of clothes, you wouldn't trouble yourself to ask me about affairs that don't concern you.'

'You may as well be civil, young feller, or I may move you on a little sharper 'an what you looks for. It's my duty to keep an eye on dangerous characters, and you've got a face like what's more often seen in a dock 'an elsewhere.'

I turned aside, leaning my shoulder on the back of the seat in silence, to signify to him that I had no wish to quarrel or make friends.'

'Oh, you may turn your back to the gas,' he continued; 'but I've got your face printed

on to my mind, and I could identify you on the book as sure as if I'd got your photograph in my pocket, I could.'

He waited for me to reply—for even a dispute must be an agreeable relief to the monotony of night-duty—but getting not a word more from me, he presently went off with measured step, slipping his lantern in his belt, and giving me one more scowl over his shoulder.

The half-hour chimed; I might move on now without waiting for the constable's aid; it was too chill sitting here. The policeman was standing in the shadow of a tree, not far from where he had left me. He made himself known by turning the light of his lantern upon me as I passed—a gratuitous insult, as it seemed to me. I wondered if he really thought I was a thief; perhaps my jaded look justified the suspicion.

I turned down towards Ham, by the path

through the field, and got out into the lower road. The mist there was thicker than above, so that it was difficult to keep to the path. A dull, yellow spot of light guided me onward from one roadside lamp to the next.

I had gone but a hundred yards or so along the road, when I heard the shrill sound of a policeman's whistle behind me. It was a stupid thing to make an enemy of that constable. I did not want him on my heels. Was he following me? I stood still and looked back. Nothing was visible but the gray mist and the dim glow of the lamp I had passed. I held my breath to listen, and, hearing no sound, came to the conclusion that, having followed me down the hill, and there being at a loss which way to turn, he had given up the pursuit, contenting himself with a vindictive whistle.

'It is a law of nature,' thought I: 'the

strong extirpate the weak; and this fellow is no worse than the well-fed dog who snaps at a starved and spiritless cur.'

With this reflection I was about to go on again, when a quick, heavy step fell suddenly upon my ear, and a man passed so close that I could hear his deep breathing and distinguish his silhouette against the lighter background. It was a second constable, hastening to answer the call of my first acquaintance. He must have cut across the strip of common that borders the road in that part—the damp turf making his approach noiseless. He did not see me, that is certain, for the moment after he reached the road he broke into a run as the whistle was blown again.

I waited till the retreating footsteps grew faint, and then I hurried on towards Ham with all the haste and silence possible, for if the police got upon my scent the purpose

with which I had come here would be frustrated. When I had passed through the village, and, stopping, heard no sound, I felt safe.

About half a mile beyond Ham is an estate which at that time had recently been purchased by Mr. Percival Thane. It derives its name, the Cedars, from a majestic avenue of those trees, which line the carriage-drive from the road, by the river-side, to the house. In the front the grounds are separated from the road by a pair of enormous iron gates and a ha-ha. The sides are protected by heavily buttressed brick walls ten feet high, but the back is cut off from the adjoining park by a wooden paling, then in course of repair. By an opening in these palings I got into the grounds easily, for I knew my way well. I was not afraid of pursuit. The police would never think of looking for me here, whither only one could make his way on such a night who was ac-

customed to groping along the walls in the dark. Yet I had to approach the house with caution. The clock in the belfry over the stables had struck out twelve just before I reached the Cedars. Idle people don't go early to bed, like those who have to be in their workshops by six in the morning. Some of the servants might yet be about. There had been a fierce storm a few days before, and the ground in the little wood was covered with fragments of rotten boughs that cracked sharply under foot. It was a relief when I reached the wicket and felt the soft turf of the paddock under my feet. By another wicket I entered the garden, and now skirting the inside of the high wall I drew near the house. It was black as night when I reached the shrubbery. There was no possibility of distinguishing the path from the borders. Presently I drove my foot with a crash into a bell-glass, and for a few minutes

I stood in doubt whether to beat a retreat or go on; then, as no sound indicated that my misadventure had raised alarm, I ventured to push on again. A dozen cautious paces brought me to an opening. The lawn was before me now, and looking across, I made out a feeble point of light that showed where the house stood. Keeping close to the shrubbery, I skirted the lawn until I was close enough to the house to make out the sashes of the one window illuminated from within; then I stopped. The blind was down; the time had not yet come.

The clock close at hand struck one—the sudden clang in the perfect silence scaring me; yet still I stood there, with my eyes on the blind, shivering with cold and mental agitation. Ten minutes more passed, and then a corner of the blind was raised. I had shot in my hand ready; I threw them, and heard them patter upon the veranda under the

window. The blind dropped immediately, and I crossed the lawn to the south side of the house, with which the domed conservatory is connected, and there at the door I waited, shivering with cold, and apathetic like a dog waiting to be let in.

I heard a key turn in the lock, and the door grating as it opened; then a soft voice asked, in a whisper :

'Is that you, Kit ?'

'Yes,' I answered, in a sullen undertone.

'Here are the indiarubbers. Be careful : they have only just gone up.'

I had grown callous to degradation. It was nothing to me now to play the part of a sneaking thief. Without a word I took the overshoes and slipped them on my feet, as I kicked off my old shoes one after the other.

The girl, coming from the light, could not see me as distinctly as I saw her. She

waited there till I told her I was ready ; then she turned about, and, feeling her way with outstretched hands, retraced her steps noiselessly through the conservatory ; and I followed, softly closing the door behind me. We passed through a room where the foot sank deep in the yielding carpet. 'If I had but a few feet of this for my bed,' thought I, 'what a luxury !' There was a light in the hall. The reflected rays glittered here and there in glass and polished furniture and costly knick-knacks. My guide, raising her finger in warning, went on first to the foot of the great stairs, to make sure that no one was stirring, and then beckoned me. At one time I would have scorned to follow any woman in this ignoble manner ; but that time was past : now my only feeling was of hunger and cold. 'I hope there's a fire and something to eat up here,' thought I, as I stealthily followed along the corridor past the chambers where

the household lay asleep. We came to a door that stood partly open, and went in.

It was like a drawing-room. You wouldn't have known it for a bedchamber but for the bed, with its eider-down quilt, and tent hangings of blue satin covered with lace, and a glimpse of the toilet-room beyond. The panels of the doors were painted—to match the hangings of the bed, the window-curtains, and the quilted stuffing of the chairs and lounges—a pale blue, picked out with gold. There were cabinets of beautiful workmanship in the corners, filled with pretty trifles, slender stands for cut flowers, and tables for every use—all that caprice could suggest or ingenuity supply to an extravagant taste. But I took no notice then of these things: I was too cold for that. Leaving my companion to fasten the door, I hastened across the room, and, sinking on my knees on the soft, thick hearthrug, I spread out my clammy

cold hands to catch the generous glow of the fire.

'Are you so cold, dear?' said a voice behind me presently, in a low, tender tone of commiseration.

I turned round without rising and looked up, my eyes blinking at first, for I was dazzled, as if I were looking at a great light. The wrap in which she had muffled herself to fetch me was thrown off, and now her head, her neck, and her arms were bare. She wore an evening dress of delicate rose-pink, and a thick silk that, following the line of her figure to the waist, broke there into sharp folds, like the drapery of the old wood-carvers. A glow of light clung about the fabric, making her arms look like unpolished marble, just as her face was made whiter by contrast with the dark hair coiled upon her head. Diamonds sparkled on her slender throat and on her wrists and hands. Looking

upwards at her, she seemed taller and more graceful than ever I had seen her before. The fine curves of her figure were those of a woman rather than a girl of eighteen. There was no colour in her face. Her eyes were large and dark, and a tear of pity added to their lustre. That is what I saw, and what I see now as I write. It was a vision to impress itself for ever on my mind. In the soft glow of the wax-lights she stood there, bending over me. It recalled to my mind a picture I had seen of Diana descending to Endymion on Latmos. But what an Endymion!

My eye, travelling down to her little foot, in its buckled shoe and silk stocking, fell upon my red hand as I rested it for support on the rug—on my frayed cuff and threadbare sleeve—on my 'thief's friend,' as we in Shoreditch called those indiarubbers—on my coarse sock and the mud-caked fringe

of my corduroy trousers. A reek of squalor and poverty rose with the steam from my sodden clothes.

Yet to this young and beautiful creature before me I was more than Endymion to Diana. They were lovers: we, alas, were husband and wife!

CHAPTER II.

CAUGHT.

'ARE you so cold, dear, that you cannot speak to me?' she asked again, in mournful reproach.

'Yes, and I am hungry and wet,' I added sharply, as she put her hand upon my shoulder and bent lower. But that warning did not prevent her from kissing my cheek.

There are misfortunes that soften a man's whole nature: mine had hardened my heart and made me brutal. I lost sight of her when I looked at myself, and the momentary feeling of delight and admiration changed to loathing and disgust. 'Why should I be thus, ragged and starving, an object to be

pitied by my wife ?' I asked myself. 'Why should I be compelled to shiver in the fog till the household was at rest, that I might creep stealthily, like a thief at her heels, to her rooms ?' It was all my own fault ; yet, soured by misfortune, brutalized by hardship, I bore a rancorous ill-will towards my poor wife, as though she were the cause of my sufferings. I had not the grace to acknowledge her kiss. Moodily I bent over the fire, unbuttoning my jacket that the heat might get at my chilled body.

Swiftly and silently she brought a table to the fireside, and spread out the contents of a lunch-basket she had prepared for me, and then, having set a chair before it, she again laid her hand timidly on my shoulder, and said :

'I have your supper ready, Kit.'

On that I got up, and seating myself in the chair, ran my eye greedily over the good

things. She poured out a tumbler of Burgundy; I gulped it down, and then attacked the ham, leaving the chicken till my craving was first satisfied with more solid food. All this time I spoke never a word, not even to thank her for the provision she had made.

'Papa gave a dinner-party, and some of the gentlemen did not leave till past twelve: that is why I had to keep you so long waiting,' said my wife apologetically, thinking that my ill-humour arose from this cause.

'And that is why you are dressed up like a princess,' muttered I, glancing at her malignantly.

She made no reply. Perhaps she gave me yet credit for sufficient sense to see that she must receive her father's guests becomingly, and that to have changed her dress after their departure would have prolonged my stay outside. As I glanced at her I perceived that

she had taken off her diamonds, in deference probably to my senseless susceptibility.

'Why have you removed your trinkets?' I continued. 'Are you afraid I shall take them?'

'Oh, Kit!' she said, clasping her trembling hands, and with supplication in her tender eyes.

I pushed my glass towards her to refill, and having done with the ham, began upon the fowl.

'Who has been here to-night?' I asked, after eating in silence awhile.

'Some boating gentlemen, to whom we were introduced yesterday by Major Cleveden.'

'And who's Major Cleveden?'

'A friend of papa's. They were very intimate in India; and,' she added admonitively, for I had raised my voice in speaking, 'he sleeps in the next room.'

'Oh, he is staying in the house!'

'He has been with us a week. He came the very day after you were here.'

'Where's his wife?'

'He is not married.'

'I see; your father thinks he would be a suitable catch for you—anything with a title—anything that would give him a place in society.'

I had fallen now into a jealous mood.

'Major Cleveden is old enough to be my father,' said she, with a look and an accent which showed how innocent she was of suspecting the thing I spoke of. 'But he is a real friend, for all that,' she continued, her spirit rising in revolt against the unmerited harshness—'a friend whom I could trust with my life; generous and kind—yes, as generous and kind as you were once, Kit.'

I pushed my plate away and turned to the fire.

'Yes,' thought I; 'when one is rich it is not difficult to be generous; in a moral sense or in a material sense the thing is equally true. And I was rich then in hope and courage; now I'm a beggar in everything, and all my feelings are sordid and mean and base. I'm done for.'

Hebe crept to my side, and kneeling on the rug, leaned her arms upon my knee (though she would have shrunk from placing her delicate skin in contact with such foul stuff as my trousers were made of at another time), and looking up into my face with all her sweet tenderness, she murmured:

'It is only eleven months ago, dear.'

I knew what she meant. It was eleven months ago that she ran away for a day from the Parsonage to be clandestinely married to me. That was just before I left Feltenham to come to London and 'make my fortune.' How we loved each other then;

how we clung together as the time came to part; how she ran weeping after me to say 'good-bye' once more when we had torn ourselves apart; how we promised each other to meet again quite soon—as soon as I had found employment and got a little home ready for her! Oh, she wouldn't mind how small it was, nor what privations she was put to, so that we could only live together. That was before her father came home with half a million of money; before she knew what it was to wear silk and diamonds; before I had found that my skill, which passed for genius in a small provincial town, was looked upon as very poor talent in London.

'I thought I had the world on a string then,' said I.

'You felt your power, dear; that is all. You knew you had gifts of a high order. Oh, everyone said there was no one so clever! You cannot have lost your talent?'

'No,' said I bitterly. 'I have just enough left, and the consciousness of it, to make me a bad workman. That's all it's good for. I've yet got to find my level and reconcile myself to it before I can be a steady workman. There are thousands of fellows with as much skill as I have at wood-carving—I know it—thousands who would be glad to work at the bench ten hours a day for eighteen shillings a week!'

'Eighteen shillings a week—would that keep us two, Kit?' she asked hopefully.

I laughed.

'Why, a year's wages at that rate wouldn't buy the dress you are wearing,' said I.

'I could do without it,' said she. 'I wore nothing but stuff eleven months ago.'

That softened my heart. But I was not such a fool in worldly matters as I had been a year back. Ay, we were fools then, indeed—boy and girl fools: nothing more.

She seventeen, I only just in my twentieth year. It should be illegal for such simpletons to marry. A year in London had opened my eyes, and I had used them to advantage in learning something of the reality of life.

'No ; I've done one foolish thing. I'll not do another of the same sort. That would be just a crime,' said I.

'A crime ! I don't understand you. What foolish thing, Kit ?'

'Supposing I settled down to the life of a plodding artisan—suppose I got a place at eighteen shillings a week ?'

'Yes,' said she cheerfully, drawing a little closer.

'Supposing I could manage to get some sort of home for you—a room in the suburbs with a few sticks of furniture, where you would have to do the drudgery, and be cribbed up all day while I was at work ?'

I looked down to see what effect this picture made upon her. She was actually smiling. The dreamy look in her eyes showed that she was not thinking of the hardships and miseries, only of the romantic sentiment ascribed to the bearing of burdens by loving hearts.

'Yes, dear,' she said again, encouragingly.

'Do you know what would happen then?' I asked.

She held her head on one side, and, looking in the fire wistfully, said, after a moment's imagining of the worst that could happen:

'I'm afraid papa would be very angry.'

'That's certain enough. You've told me enough about him to show that he loves himself more than he loves you. That's only natural. He wouldn't have sent you to England and lived in India without you for sixteen years otherwise.'

'The doctor ordered me to be sent to England, dear, when I was a child.'

'Yes; but the doctor did not order him to live in India till he was an old man.'

'Well, dear?' said she, admitting the conclusion with a sigh.

'His purpose in coming to England was to get what money could not procure him out there—a position in society. He is ambitious. You have said so. Your beauty has encouraged him to hope for an alliance which will favour his designs even more than his wealth. If he found you were married to such a—a thing as I—why, then he would abandon you to the man of your choice, and go back to India, taking his precious money with him.'

'Well, dear,' she said again, as I paused, 'you do not want his money.'

'No, not a penny of it.'

'Nor I,' with a cheerful shake of her pretty head.

'You would be content with the single room?'

'And you, Kit?'

I could go no further for the minute, looking down at her little face all aglow with love. She stretched up her arms and drew my cheek down to her lips, and my brain swam as if I had been suddenly brought out of the darkness face to face with a glimpse of paradise. It was a return of the old dream of simple days. It passed. I was awake again.

'Yes, your father would abandon you to the man of your choice,' I said.

'Well, dear?' she said once more.

'You see nothing more than that?'

'No, nothing.'

'I do. You see what hunger and cold do for me: they make me a brute. I must

be hungry and cold again. The privations I suffer you must suffer also. That will not add to my contentment. Your love must die. You must think with regret of all you have sacrificed. You must wish that we had never met—wish me dead. We must hate each other.'

She stopped me, saying 'No! no! no!' in terror, and covering her mouth with her hand, as though she feared her emotion would force from her a betraying cry.

'You would,' I insisted. 'You do not know what hardships are—what life is—yet awhile.'

'We cannot go on for ever like this, Kit. It isn't natural; it is too cruel.'

'Life is cruel,' I said; and then, lapsing into moody meditation, I added vaguely. 'No, we cannot go on like this. Something must be done. Who were those men who dined here?'

'Officers in the army, two of them, and another was Lord Somebody. I forget his name. It doesn't matter. Don't worry about them.'

She saw my face clouding again.

'But it does matter. Of course they are invited to come again.'

'I don't know.'

Her voice quavered with fear. She knew that jealousy was getting the mastery of me.

'Yes, you do know,' I muttered.

'I—I think papa gave them a general invitation.'

'Yes, and you know they'll come. He will throw you at the head of that fellow with the handle before his name. I'm glad I didn't know they were here. I should have gone mad, as I shivered outside in the fog, if I had known that you, down there amongst the flowers, were smiling at men

and listening to their flattery. Oh, they'll come again ; you had better not tell me next time,' I added fiercely. Then inconsequently I pursued, for I could not get the gnawing suspicion out of my heart : ' Those diamonds were put on to please them, which you took off not to offend me. Perhaps you did not wish me to know that you had been decking yourself out to fascinate those men ?'

She rose, and, fetching the diamonds, said gently :

' Take them away with you, Kit.'

' No ; it hasn't come to that yet,' said I brutally. ' I come here as a thief, but I leave empty-handed. I'm ashamed when I think that I owe your father for what I have eaten. But I'll finish that bottle, nevertheless ;' and I poured out and drank another tumbler of Burgundy.

It did me good. I was warm enough now, and dropping my head in my shoulders I sank

down into the soft quilted chair, and stretched my legs out before the fire.

'If you would take my purse, dear,' whispered my wife, leaning over me, 'only as a loan, it would help you to face your troubles with more courage; then you would overcome them, and getting on little by little, you could pay me back again.'

She slipped a purse into my hand, and I was weak enough, base enough, to put it in my pocket. But the consciousness of my own indignity made me savage, and going back to the old theme, I tortured my poor little wife with my jealous taunts until she wept, and I fell asleep in the chair. It was thus our meetings generally ended. Hebe watched over me. Oh, Heaven, what a contrast between us two!

I know not how long I had been asleep when I awoke with a start, hearing a shrill whistle. For the moment I thought I had

been dreaming of the policeman who followed me down the hill. But there was my wife sitting beside me and clutching my arm. Then another whistle sounded outside below the window.

'What is it?' gasped Hebe.

A window sash was thrown up, the sound was audible enough to our strained ears.

A voice called out: 'Who's there?'

Then from below came the clear reply:

'Police, sir! Come down and let us in, please. And let someone look to that room on your right. There's a light there, and there's burglars in the house!'

CHAPTER III.

AN ESCAPE, A CAPTURE, AND RELEASE.

STUPEFIED with sleep, bewildered by the sudden alarm, I did nothing. Hebe did worse. She blew out the lights upon the chimneypiece. They had betrayed us. To extinguish them was the instinctive impulse of one who feared further discovery.

'Look out there!' cried the man from below. 'They've put out the lights in the next room to you, sir.'

Doors were opened hastily in the corridor; the short, imperative orders of men's voices were mingled with the terrified supplications of women's shriller tones.

The door handle was tried; then came a sharp rap, and a man called:

'Miss Thane! Miss Thane!'

My wife, clinging to my arm, gasped in reply, her voice scarcely audible:

'What is it?'

'Miss Thane! Miss Thane!' again; and then another voice, 'Hebe! Hebe!' And with that there was a violent thrust at the door that made the panels crack.

I stood like one paralyzed; a vague consciousness that discovery was inevitable seemed to numb my faculties. But Hebe, more quick witted—as women ever are in time of danger—ran to the door, and cried:

'What is it, papa?'

'Open your door. Burglars are in the house. A light has been seen in here.'

'One moment,' she answered; and then turning to me, she implored me to hide.

What was the use of that? Their motive

in entering the room was to search. Would the father leave any corner of his daughter's room unexamined? At that moment there was a diversion.

'Hallo, there!' cried the voice outside; then, in a higher key, 'This way, Davis—here they are!'

Then there followed a confusion of sounds—the smashing of glass in the conservatory—a scuffle—sharp blows—muttered imprecations—the quick approach of steps upon the gravelled path—a howl of pain—then another crash of glass—and cries of 'He's off!' 'Stop him!' 'Over the lawn!' 'After him!' mingled together, and the slamming back of the conservatory door—feet pattering over the grass and clattering down the path. Then comparative silence, broken only by the distant call of men to men in the grounds.

My senses came back to me, and with them decision and energy.

'Now is my time to escape,' I whispered.

I slipped to the window, drew aside the blind, and as swiftly and silently as I might lifted the sash. Outside it looked thicker and darker than ever. I could see nothing, but I knew that the veranda was not more than a yard below the window-sill.

'Kit—Kit. what are you going to do?' whispered my wife in terror, hearing the movement of the sash.

'It's all right. I can slip down from the veranda easily enough,' I answered.

Bang! bang! at the door again, and old Thane's voice calling impatiently to his daughter to open.

'Shut the window after me,' I said hurriedly, slipping out and dropping my feet down on to the iron veranda. 'Open the door, and occupy your father's attention; but take off that dress first.'

The window closed, my poor wife mur-

muring a prayer for me; and now, with a view to dropping from the veranda at the further end, where I knew there was a flower-bed on which my fall would be more noiseless than on the gravelled terrace, I began to creep along, crouching down and groping upon the wall for anything that might give me a hold, for I felt the sloping iron, wet and greasy with the fog, treacherously slippery under my indiarubbers. I got hold of a window-sill. My eyes were again growing used to the fog, and I could now see the edge of the veranda, which at first had been invisible to me. Whose window was this? Was there a light in the room, and any danger of discovery here? I looked up. Good heavens! just above me was a man, leaning upon the very sill I had my hand on, calmly regarding me. He must have seen me slip out by the window from the next room; must have heard me speak to Hebe. It was that Major Cleveden of whom

she had spoken. Doubtless he concluded that I was Miss Thane's lover, for, like a gallant gentleman, he made no attempt to raise an alarm, knowing it would expose Hebe, but without a word suffered me to pass close before his eyes.

I crept on a few yards and got hold of the next window-sill; then another window was thrown up—one in my wife's room. The Major was still where I had seen him. I heard him say calmly:

'You have found nothing in Miss Thane's room, I hope?'

A voice from beyond replied; it was Hebe's father who spoke:

'No. Hebe had left her light burning. On hearing the policeman's whistle she sprang up in alarm and upset the candlestick. That accounts for what was seen from outside. You have seen nothing?'

'Nothing,' answered the Major; then he

added, in the same tranquil tone, to warn me and save my wife, I believe : ' There's a light moving across the lawn ; the police are coming back.'

' I'll go and see if they've caught the rascals,' said Mr. Thane ; ' there's little hope of that, though. It seems they've cleared all the silver from the dining-room—so Horrocks tells me.'

I crept on more carefully than ever, reckoning that I could not be above a dozen feet or so from the end of the veranda, but I kept my eye across the lawn, where I could see the light from a bull's-eye sweeping the shrubbery and gradually drawing near.

The veranda sloped at an angle which made advance difficult in the extreme, especially where the façade of the house offered no hold to the hand. Suddenly my foot slipped on the greasy surface. For a moment I thought I should pitch headlong down on to the ter-

race. With a violent effort I regained my footing, but not without considerable noise. Mr. Thane, coming on to the terrace at that instant, was just in time to hear the squeaking of my indiarubbers on the wet iron and the thump with which I came down on my hands and knees.

'Police!' he called; 'there's one of them up here on the veranda!'

'We'll have him, sir,' answered the man.

I heard the thud, thud, thud of his feet, and saw the ray of his lantern swinging from side to side as he ran across the lawn. There was no time for reflection. I threw myself on my chest, and the next moment I slid over the edge and came clattering to the ground with a length of gutter that broke away from the veranda edge under my weight. Before I could recover the use of my feet, the policeman had seized me by the collar, and was

grinding his knuckles into the nape of my neck.

'We've got one on 'em, anyhow,' said he, in triumph. 'Let's have a look at you.'

Then, having thrust his bull's-eye full in my face, he added:

'Ah, I thought I should see you again, my joker! You're the young fellow I spotted on Richmond Hill.'

A distant whistle and the faint sound of voices calling in another part of the grounds cut short further comment.

'Hallo, they've got another of them up there,' cried he; 'here, sir, you must take charge of this fellow while I run to my mate.'

Old Thane, who had grappled on to my arm with a vigorous show of courage while there was little likelihood of my escaping from the constable's firm grip, now showed the white feather.

'Don't go away, constable—don't leave me

alone with this desperate scoundrel,' he cried; 'I'm not equal to it. I can't be responsible for him.'

'Very sorry, sir, but you'll have to be. I calls upon you in the Queen's name. There's my mate's whistle again. It's my duty to leave him in your custody, in the Queen's name. He's safe enough. Catch hold on him here, sir, and hold him tight.'

With neat dexterity he had fished out a pair of handcuffs from his pocket and closed them with a snap upon my wrists; and leaving me in the old gentleman's hands, he bolted off to join the other constable.

I might have easily wrenched myself from the feeble hands that now held me. Mr. Thane was old and corpulent, and the tone of terror in which he called upon his servants to come to his assistance showed that a mere menace on my part would suffice to make him release me. But what chance of escape had

I with my hands fettered? I should be retaken for a certainty by the police and the men from the house who were scouring the copse by which I must pass to get away; and the attempt at evasion would confirm the belief that I was one of the gang that had broken into the house.

Mr. Thane, grasping my collar with both hands, continued to call for help, and curse the servants in between for having left the house. Presently I caught sight of a tall, spare figure in the doorway of the hall, standing out against the light within.

'That you, Cleveden?' cried Mr. Thane, in a tone of profound satisfaction. 'Come here and help me, there's a good fellow. That confounded constable's left me in charge of this burglar, and all the servants are out of the way, of course. It's a shameful thing to leave a ruffian of this sort on my hands. And, look here, you know I have only got

my slippers on. I shall have another attack of rheumatic gout to-morrow, as sure as fate. What on earth are we to do with the fellow? It's as much as I can do to hold him with both hands, and I've nothing on my back but this dressing-gown. Feet wet through. This will kill me.'

The Major had come to my side.

'Leave him to me,' he said, touching my arm coolly. 'Is that tool-house open?'

'Yes. Ah, capital idea! Clap him up there. There's a strong bolt outside, and no means of escape from within.'

'Get me the lamp, will you?'

'Certainly.'

Mr. Thane went off with alacrity, and, returning with the lamp, now offered to show the way to the tool-house.

'I can manage very well by myself. I see our prisoner is handcuffed. Go in and see to Miss Thane. I am afraid the fright has

upset her. A couple of the maids are in there, but they seem all to have lost their wits. Pray go.'

The old gentleman seemed mightily pleased to have so good an excuse for getting out of his duty; he, however, warned the Major to be careful with me, as I was a terribly rough customer to deal with. The light from the lamp lit up the Major's face, and I saw the ends of his moustache go up, and something like a smile crease his thin cheeks as he looked at me.

I went quietly enough into the tool-house. The Major set down the lamp on a chaff-cutter, closed the door, and having flicked the dust off a billet of wood with his handkerchief, seated himself and pulled out a cigar-case. I sank down on a faggot beside the chaff-cutter and dropped my head. The Major struck a light and puffed at his cigar: there was no other sound. When I looked

up I found him regarding me curiously, his brows creased together.

'It has come to this,' said I to myself; 'I shall be sent to gaol for a burglar. There's no way out of it but by letting all the world know that a woman laid all her faith in my love and honour, and that I had not enough of either to keep her secret and save her from disgrace. No, I won't do that. I'll go to gaol. A little more degradation will not make much difference to my sum. I shall come out no worse off than I go in. I'll go away then—to America or New Zealand. Hebe shall not hear of me till I'm in a position to claim her as my wife. I can get on there, putting my pride in my pocket and working steadily; and I *will* get on. Ay, this is a proper time for making good resolutions! If I had plucked up a bit of courage at first, instead of letting myself sink into torpor and despair, I should have

spared Hebe an age of misery and got on the way to better things. I'll mend, though, please God, when I'm free again. I will lighten her burden if I can, and make up some day for the unhappiness I have brought upon her now. I will give a false name when I am taken before the magistrate; there will be less likelihood then of my being identified as a gaol-bird when I come out of prison. Perhaps I may get off with a couple of years, seeing that I'm a "first offender." Anyhow, my punishment will be less than hers. Was ever woman so punished for marrying a man? What are these fetters compared with hers—fettered for life to a thing like me? Hearts don't break, or surely hers could not beat on lovingly when the man she has regarded as a hero sinks to the supine brutal clod she found me to-night. Will she remember me as she last saw me—indifferent to her caress, yet rancorously jealous of those who valued

her sweetness more—only ceasing to torment her gentle spirit with innuendo and reproach when my senses were dulled with over-feeding? No; she will remember me by something better. Oh, if I were free now! What then?

> "'The devil was sick, the devil a saint would be;
> The devil grew well, the devil a saint was he."

No; better go to gaol. Yet it's hard—a young fellow of twenty—to go and herd with felons. If mother were living to see me thus!'

The polished steel of the handcuffs shimmered before my eyes; I think it was that turned my memories back to the old home. I fancied I saw in the shining bend of the fetters a reach of the river where as a lad I used to sit with my rod by a gap in the reeds through which one saw the flat meadow on the other side all red with sorrel. Then my thoughts wandered to the long, low work-

shop behind our cottage, where I worked beside my father at the bench making those oak presses for which he was famous all the country round. What a fine old fellow he was, my father! His work reflected his character—solid and honest and true. If I had been content to stick to the old craft as he did, I might have become a man like him. But would Hebe have loved and married me? No. She was filled with admiration for my genius. Genius! I never had it. Just enough skill as a carver of toys to pass for genius in that out-of-the-way place, and to make the simple folk wonder. I recalled the day that old Mr. Northcote, the rector, brought Hebe to look at a panel I had carved. I had never seen her closely before that time. She seemed altogether beyond my world. The rector made some commonplace remark about application and talent bringing one fame; and Hebe said, looking at me with glowing

enthusiasm: 'Oh yes; you will be great one of these days.' And this is what I had sunk to! I could not dwell on these memories any longer. I shook myself to get free of the maddening reflections they brought. A tear had run down my cheek; I brushed it away with my joined hands, and looked up at the Major.

He may have been wondering whether this inert, spiritless, moody wretch in a frayed jacket, and corduroys shining at the knees with the rubbing of the bench and mess of an upholsterer's workshop, could really be the accepted lover of Hebe Thane. For such a thing as me had she sacrificed so much, and run the risk of a degrading discovery? He met my eyes, and continued to regard me with the same look of puzzled inquiry. Perhaps he sought to read through my eyes some better explanation of Hebe's infatuation than he could find elsewhere. He gave it up

at length, as a thing past comprehension, raising his eyebrows as he looked at the ash of his cigar and expelled a thin stream of smoke from his lips, with a return of that cynical smile I had before seen on his face.

We sat there, face to face, for five—ten minutes—I knew not how long—in such silence that even the drawing of his cigar was audible. Suddenly he took the weed from his lips and turned his head, listening. We both heard a cautious step on the gravel outside. The latch was carefully raised. He rose, laying his hand on one of the tools piled in the corner near him, regarding the door with the calm, self-possessed look of a brave soldier.

'Hebe!' I exclaimed, springing to my feet, as I caught sight of the pale face at the opening door.

The Major threw down his cigar, and stepped forward quickly.

'Miss Thane!'

'Oh, Major Cleveden!' cried she, in a broken voice, hardly audible for emotion; 'do let me speak to you!'

'Certainly,' said the Major; and he passed out, closing the door after him, and shutting off from my straining gaze the sight of that pale, terrified face—those large, deep eyes that looked beyond him to me in unspeakable anxiety and tenderness.

I know now why she was there. She had learnt from her father where I was confined and who guarded me, and the secret she could not confide to him she had come here to disclose to the Major—the friend whom she 'could trust with her life'—in the belief that for her sake he would save me from disgrace. At that time I could only surmise her purpose; but the belief in her heroic generosity kindled a flame of gratitude from the spark of good

feeling that still rested at the bottom of my heart.

I was not left long in doubt as to the Major's reply to Hebe's appeal. He re-entered the tool-house with a quick step.

'Your wife has told me all,' he said, in a low tone. 'Her happiness depends on your getting away. Can you escape?'

'I *will* escape!' I repeated vehemently. 'Heaven knows she has suffered enough by loving me too well; but she shall suffer no more. I will not be retaken alive if I can get the use of my hands.'

These words seemed to have a peculiar force for him. His fingers were upon my handcuffs, feeling for the spring that closed them. He paused an instant, looking into my face with his piercing eyes to read the extent of my meaning.

'Well,' he said, 'I would do the same for her, and since you are not guilty of that

for which these fetters have been put upon you, I shall remove them, and take the responsibility upon myself.'

These words had but a simple meaning for me then; but in recalling them I perceive their deeper significance.

As he spoke he found the spring and released my hands.

'One moment,' said he; and, going out by the open door, he looked to the right and left, listening intently. Then he came back.

'The coast is clear. You know the place better than I do; but I must warn you that the front entrance is guarded. God speed you!'

CHAPTER IV.

A COMPANION IN ADVERSITY.

The fog had thickened or the moon had sunk; certainly it was more obscure now than it had been hitherto. But I knew the position of the tool-house well, and that by keeping the path along the shrubbery I should come ultimately through the garden to the paddock and so into the spinny. But, there, what was I to do? Without doubt the gap in the palings through which I had entered would be guarded, and the approaches to it would be dangerous. My chance lay in feeling my way to the palings at some point between the wall and the gap. But how could I succeed in crossing the wood without attracting attention by the

snapping of the brittle litter under my feet? At every step I advanced I risked encounter with a constable or one of the many servants who were scouring the place. The advantage afforded by the darkness was pretty evenly balanced by the disadvantages. The path was perilous, yet I dared not leave it, for amongst the garden beds I might wander round and round in a circle until broad daylight. There was nothing for a guide but the gravelled path. Happily my goloshes made my footsteps inaudible. I kept on with my hands outstretched, ready at the slightest touch to spring back. Now and then my toe striking against the box-edging of the walk warned me that I was going from the straight line; but I had no other guide. The darkness seemed impenetrable. Nevertheless, when I had, as I thought, made about a couple of hundred yards from my starting-point, I detected a slight glimmer of light on the ground at a

little distance from my foot as it touched an edging. I stopped, wondering what it could be. Not a glow-worm, surely. I stooped down and bent forward; then I perceived clearly a chink of light, such as might be seen through the ill-closed door of a dark lantern. Had a constable set it down that he might advance with less risk of discovery? It seemed unlikely; yet I could not otherwise account for its being there. A lantern it was assuredly. A bold notion struck me. I knew that it is more difficult to discern a man who flashes a light in your face than if he carried no light at all. If I took up the lantern and advanced boldly with it, I might find my way to the palings quickly enough; I might see danger before me and elsewhere by flashing it around me from time to time. No one would suspect a man carrying an open lantern of being an escaping burglar. If I encountered anyone I could in a moment dash down the

light and bolt, and be no worse off than if we had run against each other in the dark. I determined to possess myself of the lantern and hazard it, at an rate. I set my foot over the edge and leaned forward to take it, yet not without precaution, for it might be that the lantern had been laid there as a bait, and that as I stooped to take it the crafty trapper might pounce upon me.

As I took up the lantern, the door swung open, and the light flashed full upon the brick wall against which it was set, revealing the strands of a cord ladder and the whole mystery of the light being there. It was by this ladder that the burglars had got over the wall. They had set down the lantern as a guide to discover it when they returned from the house with their plunder. In their flight they had lost the path, and had been unable to find it again in the darkness.

I closed the lantern instantly, and thrust it

deep amongst the foliage on the ground. I had no need of that now; a better and surer means of escape had been providentially offered. There was not a moment to spare. The flash of the lamp might have been seen. I fancied I heard a movement at no great distance. Impelled by fear, I grasped the ropes high up, without waiting to get my feet in the stirrups, and began to pull myself up hand over hand, but not without noise. Some leaves yet hung on the fruit-tree trained against the wall; the leaves rustled and the twigs cracked under me. I felt the top of the wall against my knuckles, as it became certain that my fears were realized. A voice below whispered:

'Is it you, Hooky?'

I got my hands on the wall and, abandoning the rope, scrambled up. There I paused an instant. The possibility of being followed by the man who had called to 'Hooky' pre-

sented itself; I resolved to pull up the ladder, and so take away the means of pursuit. But as I got hold of the rope I felt it clutched below. With a sharp wrench I dragged it free.

'What are you at, Hooky?' with a curse, muttered the voice below; then: 'You're not going to act dirty to a pal, are yer? By G—, if you don't drop it down to me, I'll blaze at you, if I bring the whole lot down on me and swing for it!'

I was not afraid of being hit, but I did fear someone on the other side of that wall being brought to the spot by the report of a pistol before I had got clear off. The man below was obviously a burglar, and, after all, I had nothing to fear from him. I dropped the ladder.

I slipped down the outer side of the wall to my full length, and then let go. There was a ditch below; my feet slid upon the side,

and I went in up to my knees in water. Before I had pulled myself out, the burglar came down with a splash beside me. We rubbed against one another. He laid hands on me savagely.

'I'm a good mind to drown you in this cussed ditch!' he growled. 'What d'ye mean by going for to lug up the rope when I called to you, Hooky?'

'I'm not Hooky,' said I in a low tone.

'What!' he pulled out the lantern he had slipped in his pocket, and opening it upon my face, muttered: 'No, no more you ain't!'

'Let go, and shut up that thing,' said I; 'there's sure to be someone along this path. We've made noise enough to draw them on us, dropping in this ditch.'

'Right you are,' said he, shutting the lantern and slipping it back in his pocket. 'Do you know any way out er this without goin' that path?'

'Yes—if I can anyhow find it through this fog.'

'Well, have a try at it, mate. You're a good sort. Don't bear me no grudge for bein' a bit rough on you,' he added, as we struck out together from the path. 'I tell you, square, I thought you was Hooky.'

There was grass under our feet; I knew that if we could only keep a tolerably straight line, we must come in time to the palings of Richmond Park. Before long the rising ground convinced me that we had not gone far astray.

My companion kept close to my side, and for some time kept silent, but as we advanced, and he grew more confident of escape, he became communicative.

'This is the rummiest job I was ever on,' said he. 'Never knowed of a crib being cracked by two lots at one time afore. I sorter made a straight shot at it when we came across them boots outside the green'us,

but Hooky he would have it as it wasn't nothin' else but a gardener left 'em there accidental. I was for turnin' of it up on them grounds, but Hooky he would go on, 'cause he'd got the straight tip from the butler this afternoon as there was a dinner on, and the housekeeper what looks after the shiney was abed with the mulligrubs. We've been hanging about the crib ever since Monday week, waitin' for a bit of fog and a likely chance, and then just for to think you should step in fust! You ain't got no mate, are you?'

'No.'

'Standin' in with the servants—hey? What we call the sneakin' lay—no offence, maty. Everyone must have a beginning, and I don't know no better way than standin' in with the servants—though it ain't respectable according to Hooky. But, then, he is so confounded proud. I thought you was him—I did, upon

my word—and I wasn't much undeceived by you pullin' up of the ropes, for I haven't got any faith in Hooky, and if it served him to do a pal a dirty action, he'd act dirty accordin'. Let's have a breathe, maty.'

The grass was slippery, the hill steep, the ground tangled with brambles. I was not averse from resting awhile. I said nothing, but my companion was a chatty villain, and continued to speak of Hooky's faults and failings at some length, blaming his want of caution, foresight, and attention to friendly advice, which had resulted in their nearly getting caught, and spoiling a good game, after wasting a week in preparing to play it.

'Never mind; Hooky ain't out of the wood yet, I know; and, maybe, for all his cleverness and upperhandedness and sly fakements, he'll get put up for this job. Hillo! what's that? There, what did I tell yer? That's the peelers! D'ye hear?'

I did hear a faint whistle in the distance, and as we stood holding our breath another whistle answered. Then came a moment's silence, followed by the flat crack of a pistol-shot.

'That's Hooky!' said my companion. 'He's done it. There's a stiff 'un to answer for now! Good-bye, Hooky—I don't stay in the same ring with you after this. I'm off to Birmingham, as a honest workman out of collar, this blessed day. Come on, maty; we're a little too warm here.'

CHAPTER V.

STEPS IN THE RIGHT ROAD.

'ARE ye a-comin', maty?' asked the burglar, in a hoarse whisper, pausing after a couple of heavy strides forward.

I made no reply.

Tragic affrays are so common in the papers that one reads of this man being killed or that one badly maimed almost with indifference; but to hear the shot fired which you know may have put a man to death within a few hundred paces is another thing. I could not move, could not speak, for the sickening apprehension of what was going on behind in the place I had but just now escaped from.

'Well, stay where y'are,' growled my com-

panion, taking my silence in bad part, and he plunged on with a curse.

Long after he was gone out of hearing, I stood there, expecting some sound—another shot, a cry, a whistle, the approaching footsteps of Hooky or the police—anything to take the place of that void in which I seemed to exist; yet I heard nothing but the throbbing of the blood in my veins and the occasional pat of a drop falling upon a dead leaf.

I found myself at the palings of the park without knowing how I got there. I must have turned about and gone up the hill mechanically. In the same unconscious way I made my way across Wimbledon and so down into Putney. There I noticed that it was a quarter to six by the clock of the post-office. It must have been eight when I got to the house where I lodged in Old Street Road.

My landlady met me on the stairs, a candle

in her hand, for the fog here was black, and the darkness greater than at Richmond in the middle of the night.

'Oh, you're come home, are you?' said the woman, blocking the passage. 'What's gone of your hat?'

I put my hand to my head and discovered that I was hatless. I had not noticed it before.

'And what in the world are you been a-doin' to yourself? You're all of a mess of mud from end to side.'

'I must have fallen down,' I said, passing her, and going towards my room.

'Oh, well, look here, young man,' she called after me, 'if you can afford to go out a-spreein' all night you can just manage to pay me what's my dues.' She broke off to exclaim, as I went up the next flight of stairs, and the light of her lamp fell upon my feet: 'Well, I never; if you ain't got on goloshes. Look here, mister——'

But I had reached my room, and, shutting the door, I lost the rest. Still, as I went about to find matches and light my lamp, I heard her talking to the lodgers below in a high voice that was meant for my ear.

I sank down on a chair before the lamp that cast a dim glimmer on the grimy table. I wanted to concentrate my thoughts, to form some clear and distinct idea of what should be done in the crisis to which matters had come. That is what I had been vainly attempting to achieve as I plodded homeward. It seemed as if the fog had got into my mind and blurred all ideas in dense obscurity.

As I sat down something in my pocket chinked against the chair. It was the purse given to me by Hebe. Even that had gone out of my mind. Now, as I held it in my hand, the soft, cool kid reminded me of her touch. Would those gentle fingers ever clasp my hand again? I asked myself, my

heart sinking with a dim foreboding that we had parted for ever—that the course I sought to find must lead me far from her. It is in losing a treasure that one realizes all its value. That's the way of the world—to mourn for those a little timely consideration would have kept.

'She never reproached me,' I said to myself, still tenderly caressing the purse; 'never murmured against the hard fate to which her folly and her love had brought her. How soft and low her voice was! How bravely she hoped on when I was sunk in cowardly despair! Oh, what I have lost! If I could but recall those last few hours—only the last minute—that I might leave her at least the hope of better things! What has she to hope for? What sign of tenderness or manly strength have I given her?'

In this strain I continued to indulge my remorse for some time, and then, with a heavy

sigh, I summoned all my resolution to settle practically what it was I had to do. The better feeling that had come into my heart when I was made captive had not left me when I found myself once more free. No; I would make a great effort. I would do what was right. I clung to that idea as the one chance of redeeming myself and retrieving the past. One thing was clear: I must no longer burden her with my misfortunes. I would go away and leave her in peace. I opened the purse and poured out the contents on the table. There was quite a lot of gold. I spread it out on the table. The board, dark before, was luminous now with the glitter of it. I feasted my eyes on it, saying to myself that not a farthing should be misspent: all should be employed to the good end she had in view when she pressed me to accept it. Oh, it should come back to her with rich interest!

At that moment the door was burst open rudely, and my landlady came in with her invariable 'Look here, young man!' But there she stopped, for her eyes fell on the gold. She came up to the table in silence and rested her knuckles on it, looking down at the money, her mouth open, and her eyes round with wonder. There she stood, her lips firmly closed, and, bending her brows, looked straight at me.

'Are you a miser or—*or what?*' she asked, in a low tone.

'What does it matter to you what I am?' said I.

'It matters a good bit to me. You haven't paid me for a fortnight, and I've seen you eating dry bread more like a starved dog than a Christian. You've been getting thinner and more haggider and more wild-looking every day.'

'Take what I owe you,' said I, pushing a sovereign across the table.

'No; I won't touch it afore I know it's honestly come by. I've managed to keep myself straight in spite of hard times. Nothing can be said against my house, and I ain't going to get myself into trouble for a few shillings.'

'Do you think I'm a thief?' I asked, the little blood I had in my veins rushing hot up into my face.

'I know you are—that's more!' cried she, raising her voice as I had raised mine, and retorting fierceness for fierceness. 'Don't tell me that's London mud on your sleeves! Look at it—it's yeller! Oh, you don't deceive me! And them goloshes—how did you come by them, when you went out in your hobnails?'

I laughed. It was my hungry look that had condemned me, just as my homelessness had damned me in the eyes of the constable.

'I'm sorry to see you laugh, young man,' said she, her voice losing its harshness. 'I'd

a-rather see you breakin' your heart a-crying. I've got a son, Heaven help me! He was a jobbing turner in the Curtain Road, same as what you are a carver; and what with the cutting trade, and strikes, and a drop of drink, and a gal, and one thing and another, he went wrong. I was hard on him, and that made him worse.' She broke off, her thick lips trembling; then, swallowing her bitter reflections, she pursued: 'And so, young man, if this is the first time—and I do think it is, for you ain't given to swearin' and drinkin', and do behave yourself more like a young gent than a cabinet-maker, mostly—and so be you're that drove by hunger you can't stand it no longer, I'll let you off your rent, and maybe I'll find a few sixpences to get your tools out of pawn and help you on a bit till you get a bit of a job. But don't you touch a penny of that money. It's the devil's wage, and can do you no good.'

'It's an angel's gift, and will make a man of me,' cried I, springing up. 'And let me get out of your debt, to begin with.'

She looked at me steadily and then at the money. I could see by the hardening of her face that she still doubted me; but the bad times weighed in my favour, and she at length took up the sovereign and gave me the change. For all that she couldn't leave the room without protest.

'Mind,' said she, 'if I find you've a-been deceiving me I'll be the first to round on you.'

I gathered up the money and put it in my pocket. Then I found an old cap, and went out with a feverish eagerness to be making some practical progress, though yet with no definite object. At the pawnbroker's in Shoreditch I redeemed my tools and the old cricketing suit I had brought with me to London; then I turned into a coffee-shop and ate heartily.

It was still night to me. The gas flared from the brackets against the greasy wall. Beyond the windows, where the steam described the smears of yesterday's cleaning, all was black. A boy coming in with a batch of papers under his arm was the only sign that another day had come. Then my heart beat quickly as I thought that those papers told of last night's tragedy—of my escape. When the waitress laid one of them on the table before me I scarcely dared to open it. It was a surprise not to see a big headline marking the new murder and burglary—a still greater when I failed to discover a single line referring to it anywhere. I eagerly got another and another paper, searching them through now with the hope of not finding what I sought. Not a word! Then that shot I heard had not taken effect- no murder had been done, and the mere escape of an unsuccessful gang of burglars had been

thought of insufficient interest to form a paragraph. Well, that was something !

The fog was clearing off when I went out, and the sun shining by the time I got back to my lodgings. It was one of those sudden changes that sometimes occur in November. I washed myself and changed my clothes, looking like another man for it ; then I shouldered my tool-bag and went out, feeling that I might not return. My landlady was standing at her parlour door as I passed through the passage. She shook her head, but said nothing. It struck me she suspected I had put on this suit as a disguise. But it was a strange one, if my end were to escape notice. People stared to see a cricketer with an artisan's tool-bag on his shoulder. The costume in itself was sufficiently out of keeping with the time of year ; but the clothes were warm and dry : that was all I cared about.

I had taken a panel carved in high relief to an art dealer in Cheapside. He promised to put it in the window and sell it if he could. That was months before ; since then I had gone week after week past the shop without going in—the sight of my work in the window was sufficiently discouraging. Thither I bent my steps now—for the last time, I expected.

There was a scaffolding in Moorgate Street, and a poster upon it caught my eye : it advertised a cheap line of packets to New York. I read it through, and went on, with a presentiment that I should come back to read it again. When I came to the shop in Cheapside I stopped dead short before the window, and could hardly breathe for the bounding of my heart. My panel was gone ! For a moment my head turned with a delirious belief that my talent was at last recognised—that my panel was sold—that others might

be ordered—that, after all, I might not have to go to New York—that I might still stay near her, and achieve success in the way she hoped for. And why should I not? Was not the field as open and as large in England as in America? Now I had a little money, could I not wait and study and work with hope and confidence, proving to her from time to time that I had turned over a new leaf and recovered my manhood? These and many more wild speculations and hopes were crowded into that one minute, and then they died in an instant, making a dull void in my heart as I crossed the threshold and caught sight of my panel upside down at the back of the shop amongst empty picture-frames.

'We've given it a fair trial, and it's no use,' said the shopkeeper; 'people don't want that kind of thing. Now, if you could turn out something humorous in the animal

line, and get it reproduced in imitation terra-cotta, we could sell 'em by the gross.'

I shook my head, and said I would take my panel away; and so I went out into the crowded street more than before an object of remark by having a panel under one arm to balance the tool-bag over the other shoulder.

Instinctively I went back to the scaffolding in Moorgate Street. I read the poster through slowly. At the foot was the address of London agents in Leadenhall Street. That was close by. Why not go there at once and take a berth? The thing would be finished then. Better that tahn wasting my money in driblets on a forlorn hope. For her sake I ought to go. That settled it.

I found my way to the shipping agents in Leadenhall Street. The clerk gaped at me like a fool. A good many unhappy men must have gone into that office, too, with the

same errand as mine; but perhaps I was the first to apply in November dressed in light cricketing flannels!

'I want to go to New York,' I began.

'When?' he asked, closing his mouth at last.

'As soon as I can.'

'One of our steamers leaves Liverpool to-morrow.'

'That will do.'

'But I don't know if there's a berth left.'

'Can't you find out?'

'Yes, in half an hour, if you like to pay for a wire.'

I paid a shilling, and said I would wait for the reply. He sent a boy off to the post with a telegram, and withdrew into an inner office to tell his fellow-clerks of the queer customer who wanted to emigrate. Glancing that way, I saw a row of heads with their noses on a level with the top of the ground-

glass with which the lower part of the partition was glazed.

There were time-tables hanging up against the wall. I occupied myself in learning the times of the trains to Liverpool till the reply telegram was handed in.

'You can have a berth,' said the clerk; 'but you'll have to be aboard, with all your traps, by ten o'clock to-morrow morning.'

'I shall have plenty of time if I take the last train to-night from St. Pancras,' thought I.

Then I paid my money, and went out with a feeling that I was going the right road now.

Nearly opposite the agents' was an outfitter's shop, where there seemed to be everything an emigrant might want. I went in there and bought what was necessary, with a box to pack my tools, panel, and everything in. At the man's suggestion, I changed my

flannels and canvas shoes for one of the suits I had bought, making use of a dressing-room that adjoined the shop. I locked up my chest and took the key, with a guarantee from the outfitter that I should find it aboard the steamer when I reached Liverpool. Here was another step made, and my heart was the lighter for it; and so I went out with something of my old elasticity and buoyancy. But though my hands were unencumbered, and I was no longer in flannels, the passers-by regarded me with curiosity. It is seldom one sees a man dressed completely in brand-new clothes from cap to boots; the only men I know of that are distinguished in this way are released convicts.

It was long since I had felt so easy at heart—so well pleased with myself. I turned into a chop-house and ate a good dinner with real pleasure. By that time it was two o'clock. I knew of a stationer's shop in the

City Road where one could sit down and write letters; and thither I bent my steps, resolved to write a letter to my wife. As I walked along, my whole soul warm and tender with love and regrets, I thought out all I would say that might make me merit the forgiveness of past faults which I knew well enough her gentle heart would accord, and encourage her to hope for better things in the future than she had reason to expect from my late conduct. Rapt in these thoughts, I trudged briskly along, taking no notice of the people I passed, and jostling more than one in my haste to get on. On the pavement just outside the North London terminus in Liverpool Street, I nearly knocked a stout old gentleman off the pavement, as he stood with his hands behind him looking at a time-bill. With a hurried apology I pushed on, when he called after me:

'Wyndham! Wyndham! Kit Wyndham!'

Then, stopping to see who it was that called me, I found myself face to face with my kind old friend, Mr. Northcote, the Vicar of Feltenham.

'Why, you're the very man, of all others, I most want to see,' he said. 'I've come up to London on your account. This is a providential meeting indeed—most providential!'

'There's nothing wrong?' I said, faltering; for a sudden foreboding of ill overcame me.

'I don't know, my good fellow,' he replied. 'Let us go into the waiting-room of this station, where we may talk it over.'

CHAPTER VI.

ARRESTED.

As we hurried up the steps to the platform he told me that he had been looking at the bill to find when the next train left for Richmond, and that there was not one for half an hour. This gave definite shape to my apprehensions. He could have no object in going to Richmond on my account, unless Hebe had sent for him, thought I; and that call must have been made with reference to what had taken place in the past night.

'However,' he added, pausing to get breath at the head of the stairs, 'now we have met by this happy accident, you may be able to save me that journey, and so enable me to

return to Feltenham by the next train and set Mrs. Northcote's mind at ease. We never got a telegram before, and it quite upset us, I assure you.'

We went into the waiting-room and seated ourselves in a quiet corner, and while I waited in impatient anxiety the old gentleman explored his pockets one after the other, talking all the while in a low voice.

'We had just finished breakfast,' he said, 'when the despatch was brought to us. Where can I have put it? It's a very thin one. And the moment she saw it, Mrs. Northcote said: "Something's happened to that poor young man, I feel sure." Ladies, you know, are so prone to make conclusions of that sort. You see, Kit, we have not heard a word about you for ten months. Where can I have put it? "Pooh, pooh, my dear!" said I; "the young fellow is making his fortune." I always predicted that, Wynd-

ham. "He's got his hands full of work, and has no time to think of us." When we are happy, we are prone to be a little careless—a little neglectful: like children who err from want of thought. I must have put it in my other pocket. "Wyndham, you may depend upon it, is prosperous," said I; I am seldom wrong in gauging character, and from the first I maintained that you were bound to succeed. And here you are, to verify my words, in a suit of clothes that looks as if you had just come out of the tailor's.'

'That is it,' I broke in: 'the buff envelope.'

'Dear me, so it is. I thought it was a soup ticket. Now, tell me what you make of that.'

I opened the telegram in an instant: it ran thus:

'From Major Cleveden, Post Office, Shoreditch—Have you seen or heard of Mr.

Wyndham ? Should he arrive in the course of the day, telegraph to me at once. Address as above.'

The Major, to have telegraphed from Shoreditch, must clearly have been to my lodgings to find me. The address was known to my wife. Why was he so anxious to find me ?

'Can you tell me what it means, Kit ?' asked Mr. Northcote, as I dropped my hand with the telegram in it on my knee.

'I am trying to think,' said I vaguely.

'We could not explain it by any hypothesis, and so I thought it best to come up at once and see the Major himself. I've been in a four-wheel cab to the post-office, Shoreditch. He is not there, but I am ready to go and find him at Richmond if it is expedient or advisable.'

I saw that something must be done to prevent his going there with the telegram

and his endless talk, which could not fail to arouse old Thane's suspicion; so, slapping my knee, as if suddenly remembering a lost fact, I said:

'Why, that must be the Major Cleveden who gave me a commission for an overmantel.'

'Dear me, now, that is strange! What a trifle to cause so much uneasiness! One would have thought it a matter of life and death by his sending a telegram. Progress and science are all very well, but their effect upon quiet, old-fashioned folk is startling in the extreme. So you know the Major, eh?'

'I have met him once,' I replied.

'So have I, and that's all. I met him last week at the Cedars; I suppose you met him there also?'

'The Cedars?' I said, as if I did not quite understand.

'Yes; the Cedars at Ham. I went there

to see an old friend of yours, and a still older friend of mine—Miss Thane. Hebe Thane,' he continued in explanation, for I still pretended not to comprehend. 'You know that she has left me, and is living with her father, who has come home a millionaire from India.'

'No,' I said.

It was not a moment to be punctilious about a falsehood.

'You have not heard of that? Well, you surprise me. I thought everyone must have heard of it. To be sure, though, London is a vast city—a prodigious city. He came home soon after you left, and took us all by surprise. Never gave us any warning of his coming. Between you and me, if he had not found her so attractive and charming, he would have gone away as he came, and left Hebe still with us. Perhaps I ought not to say this. However, he was delighted with the dear girl, and has furnished her with a

house and surroundings worthy of a princess. I went to see her last week, as I tell you, and it was there I met Major Cleveden—a most delightful, amiable gentleman, as I dare say you have found him.'

'Yes,' said I, with a deep earnestness that struck him.

'I am glad you think so; for, quite between ourselves, I should not be in the least surprised if he makes Hebe—I mean Miss Thane—his wife.'

I raised my eyebrows and shrugged my shoulders as if such a thing were possible, and might very well happen, for all I cared. But in my heart I felt the smart of jealousy.

'I am glad, also, to see that sign of indifference, Wyndham,' continued the old man; 'and now I will tell you why. Mrs. Northcote will persist in upholding that you were attached to our dear girl; that is another of the conclusions that ladies invariably make

when they see two young people together. Of course, I knew better. I said from the first that you were much too sensible to entertain a regard of that kind for a young lady whose station was considerably above your own. Mrs. Northcote even went so far as to maintain that you and our dear Hebe—Miss Thane—had formed a secret engagement, and that you had gone to London to make a fortune in order to be in a position to marry her. It was nonsense, of course; but the worst of such nonsense is that you can never get it out of a lady's head, though I've almost lost my temper with Mrs. Northcote upon this subject. And so, you see, when the telegram came she would insist upon it that it referred to some unfortunate escapade you had got into through your attachment to Miss Thane—drawing her conclusions from the telegram being sent by this Major. Well, I shall now have the pleasure of undeceiving

her when I get home—a pleasure not entirely self-congratulatory, but a pleasure arising from the vindication of your character for common-sense and straightforwardness. And it is also a pleasure to me to think that no unhappy engagement exists between you and this wealthy young lady, for though your clothes are new and respectable, they do not suggest that affluence which would be necessary to compensate a wife for giving up such vast advantages of position and surroundings as Miss Thane now enjoys.'

He continued to stream on in this strain, but I ceased to take in more than the mere tone of his monologue; for out of the hum and whirl of the traffic in the street below the hoarse voices of the newsboys detached themselves in tones that struck a new terror into my mind.

'Speshul! Speshul! Extra speshul!' they cried. 'Darin' burglary and murder this day!'

It now occurred to me for the first time that the events at Ham had taken place too late for publication in the morning papers. I could hear nothing but those cries outside now; the Vicar's voice was but an accompanying drone to my ear.

A bookstall was just opposite the waiting-room. Presently a boy hung up the contents bill of an evening paper, and I saw in large letters upon it: 'Daring Burglary at Ham—Desperate Encounter—A Policeman Killed.' Every instant I expected the Vicar to catch sight of the sheet; but he still droned on, occupied solely with his own opinions and reflections. Suddenly he started up.

'Bless my heart!' said he; 'five minutes to three. I shall lose my train.'

He shook hands hurriedly, and we parted, to my intense satisfaction.

I hurried off to my lodgings in Old Street Road.

My landlady was standing on her threshold with her hands on her hips. She started on seeing me.

'What, you've changed 'em agin!' she said, referring to my clothes. 'Look here, young man, if you've deceived me about that money, if you've passed stolen property on to me, I'll round on you: mind that. I said I would, and I will.'

'Has any one been here to see me?' I asked impatiently.

'Yes, there has. He's left a letter for you, and the sooner I get that out of my hands the better pleased I shall be. I've had trouble enough, and I don't want to get into no more.'

She gave me a letter from her pocket. I tore it open. There was but one line on the sheet of paper. Here it is:

'Get out of the country at once, if you love *her!*—C.'

I needed no further incentive. A cab was crawling along the street. I sprang in, and told the driver to take me to St. Pancras.

As I turned round I caught a last glimpse of my landlady: her lips bunched up; her face as hard as iron. She shook her head at me ominously.

'When's the next train for Liverpool?' I asked a porter as I jumped out of the cab.

'It's a standing on the main line now, ready to go. Look sharp, sir.'

I got my ticket and ran along the platform. The engine was hissing; the doors were slamming; a bell rang. I pushed my way through a knot of people waiting to see their friends off, and sprang into a carriage. I was the last one.

'Got your ticket?' asked the guard.

I held it up. He nodded and blew his whistle.

'Thank Heaven,' I murmured, '*she's* safe!'

The engine snorted; the train began slowly to move.

'Hold hard there!' called a voice in a tone of authority, and at the same moment the door was burst open and two men presented themselves. I thought I knew the look of one; though he wore a morning suit he had the unmistakable air of a constable.

'That's him!' said he, looking at me.

'Come out, sharp!' said the other.

'What for!' I demanded.

'What for?—why, for murder! that's what for.'

CHAPTER VII.

COMMITTED FOR TRIAL.

I WAS not less surprised than the rest of the passengers by the charge made against me. I think I joined them in a murmured exclamation of astonishment. The Major's message had led me to expect apprehension for being concerned with the burglars in their attempt upon the house; but it had never entered my mind that the more serious crime might be attributed to me. How could I have committed the murder which had taken place ten or fifteen minutes after I had left the grounds?

This was neither the time nor the place to defend myself, and as a peremptory 'Out ye

get!' came from my old enemy the constable of Richmond Hill, I stepped out on to the platform. The officers on each side, with a tight grip on my arms, pushed a passage through the crowd of porters and idlers who had run up to see what was the matter, and hurried me off to the adjacent station of the Metropolitan Railway; warning me on the way that anything I might say would be taken in evidence against me. That was an unnecessary caution: I had nothing to say.

It was dark when we reached Richmond; nevertheless, a crowd flocked about us as we marched quickly along the street, some running on in front to get a full look in my face as I came into the light of the gas. All seemed to know me. 'They've got him!' 'The fellow who shot the policeman last night!' was echoed from side to side. In the police station I was put into a raised dock,

where a bar closed me in. The inspector took the constable's deposition, and then turning to me asked my name.

'William Smith,' I said, hoping that my real name might never be discovered.

'William Smith,' said the inspector as he wrote, '*alias* what ?'

I made no reply.

'Like the rest of your family, no address ?' he continued.

'No.'

Then a description was taken of my personal appearance ; my height was measured ; I was searched and handed over to the warder.

'Do you want to communicate with anyone ?' he asked, as he led me into the cell.

'No. When shall I be tried ?'

'You'll be took before the magistrate tomorrow.'

There was a wooden bedstead at the end

of the whitewashed vault. I sat down on it, and set myself to think out how I should defend myself without casting suspicion on my wife or implicating the Major, who had befriended us.

But I could see nothing clearly. What questions would be put to me, or how I should answer them, I knew not. It was like fighting in the dark. I grew desperate with the sense of my own impotency, and as I buried my face in my hands I felt the blood pulsating in my temples as if it would burst my veins. At length, overcome with the physical exertion and the mental strain of the last twenty-four hours, I fell asleep. I sank unconsciously upon the plank bedstead, and there slept soundly till it was broad daylight. That did me good: I woke calm and clear headed. I saw at once that I had but to hold my tongue to save my wife. There was no power to make me

betray her. I should be punished for my contumacy, doubtless; but I should bear my punishment alone, and it would be lessened by the reflection that I had done my duty by her. With these thoughts I ate my prison breakfast cheerfully when it was handed through the square trap in the door. A good souse in a bucket of water added to my vigour, so that I looked forward without dread to my coming examination, only impatient of delay lest it should sap my resolution. There was a Bible on the shelf that served as a table; I opened it at the Psalms, and centred my thoughts upon what I read. I was thus occupied when the key turned in the door. 'My time has come!' thought I, closing the book and putting it back in its place.

The door opened, and a middle-aged gentleman in a black frock coat, closely buttoned up, bustled in, followed by the head-warder.

He had a thin, hatchet face, close-cut, sandy-gray whiskers, a long nose, and a pair of piercing eyes, deep sunk, under wonderfully mobile eyebrows of the same sandy-gray colour as his whiskers.

They met as he came to a stand, and looked me over in silence ; then they went up, as he said, setting down his little black bag on the shelf :

'Your name is Wyndham.'

'I don't wish my name to be known in connection with this affair. I call myself William Smith.'

'Very good ; I understand. Your name, though, is sure to come out at the trial. However, for the present, you are William Smith. My name is Beeton. I am a solicitor instructed to act in your defence.'

'By whom ?'

'A friend,' he replied, with a most significant bend of his eyebrows.

My heart leapt; I knew that the friend was Hebe.

'Now, we have no time to lose,' he continued briskly, taking off his gloves with a couple of jerks and slipping them in his coat pocket. 'We go before the magistrates in half an hour, and have to lay down our course of action beforehand.'

Saying this, he opened his bag, and fished out a small blotting-pad and a portable inkstand. The warder, who had closed the door and stood in surveillance, suggested that the sergeant might grant the use of a room.

'Very comfortable here, thank you, warder,' replied Mr. Beeton, laying his writing material on the shelf, and seating himself before it on the block that serves prisoners for a chair. 'Now, then, William Smith, you are charged with burglary and murder. You plead not guilty, of course, on both counts.'

'Yes.'

'What is your line of defence—with regard to the burglary, to begin with?'

'I have none.'

He glanced up sidelong at me with one eye; the eyebrow was a note of interrogation. I had nothing to add.

'Do you deny being on the premises at the time of these events?'

Here his eyebrows fell into a straight line like a dash, and seemed to imply the impolicy of that plea.

'No. I was there,' said I.

'Then, how will you account for falling into the hands of the police?'

'I shall not attempt to account for it. I shall refuse to answer any questions as to that part of the business.'

'You cannot hope for acquittal on the charge of burglary by that means.'

'Whatever the consequences may be, I will

say nothing whatever relating to the events that took place before my escape from the tool-house.'

'That is your fixed intention?'

'It is.'

I thought there was a look of approval in the expansion of his eyebrows; there certainly was in his tone as he said, 'Very good,' and proceeded to write a few words.

'Now, William Smith, how do you propose to clear yourself on the other count?'

'By telling the simple truth,' said I.

'Then out with it, and let me hear the whole story,' said he, turning round full to the little shelf, and bending over his blotting-pad, pen in hand.

I told him simply how I had found the rope ladder, how I had been overtaken by the housebreaker, how we had groped our way across the meadow and up the hill, and how we had there heard the shot which

my companion attributed to Hooky. Mr. Beeton listened attentively, and jotted down a line or two now and then. There was character even in the man's long, thin ear. It moved like his eyebrow, and in its diverse twitching I fancied there was expression of astonishment, doubt, and satisfaction. When I came to the end, he turned round with a jerk, looked me straight in the face, and said:

'I believe every word you've said. Keep to that, and we'll get off on the graver charge, and perhaps—I say perhaps—on the lesser. But you must not expect to be acquitted by the magistrates. If they believed you as I do, they would not take upon themselves the responsibility of deciding in your favour. They'll send you up for trial.'

'Very well,' said I.

At this moment the sergeant came to say

that I must be taken up at once to the court.

The inquiry was made with closed doors. The only witnesses present were Mr. Thane, a doctor, the constable, and the detective who had apprehended me. I was surprised to find that the Major was not there.

I recognised Mr. Thane rather by inner consciousness than by anything else. In the fog and darkness his features were indistinguishable; I had never seen his face before. Hebe's fear of him and his behaviour when I was placed in his custody had led me to expect in him the appearance of a bully, for bullies I have found invariably cruel and cowardly. That heavy, red-faced, unhealthy-looking man with the heavy jaw, sensual mouth, and shifty, irritable eyes just answered to my preconception. As a vision of my wife, beautiful, sweet, and

gentle, rose before my eyes, I wondered how she could owe her being to him. Happily we have two parents, and the offspring may be as like the one and unlike the other as the delicate blossom of the tea-rose to the briar on which it is grafted. As he caught sight of me he nodded his head fiercely in recognition, and spoke sharply to the gentleman by whom he sat.

The charge was read over, the doctor made a statement with regard to the murdered man, and then the constable Jennings was called upon to make his deposition.

Jennings told how he had seen me first waiting about on Richmond Hill, and how my behaviour had led him to suspect that I was a bad character, and after no good; how he had followed me down into the Ham Road, and there been joined by Sanders, the

murdered constable, to whom he signalled with his whistle.

'Sanders told me,' he proceeded, 'that he had seen two suspicious characters hanging about Mr. Thane's house two or three days, so we thought we would take a look round the premises. Sanders said the fencing was being done up at the back of the grounds, and that was the likeliest place for any one to get in. We were going up by the wall on the Richmond side of the garden when we heard a glass smash inside, which led us to feel pretty sure there was something on.'

'A bell glass was broken on the side border,' said Mr. Thane.

It was the one I had struck with my foot in the dark.

Jennings, continuing his story, told how he and Sanders with difficulty, having to feel their way through the fog without

using their bull's-eyes for fear of discovery, at length reached the house. There was a light at the back of the house in the first story.

'That was in my daughter's room. She burns a nightlight,' explained Mr. Thane.

'There was also another on the second story on the north side.'

'Those are the servants' rooms. I knew it,' said Mr. Thane eagerly.

'We tried all the windows and doors and found them close. Sanders thought we had been heard by the burglars and had frightened 'em off; but just as we was about turning of it up, I discovered a pair of nail-boots against the conservatory-door. Them boots there.' He pointed to my boots, standing on a chair. 'We then knew one of the gang must have been let in by some of the servants.'

'I was sure of it!' broke in Mr. Thane.

'Packed every one of 'em off the moment after prayers this morning!'

The clerk of the court calmed the excited gentleman with a gentle, deprecatory movement of his pen; meanwhile my solicitor made a note, and his eyebrows twisted into a bracket that seemed to enclose a very important passage.

'Sanders and me,' pursued Jennings, 'knew the prisoner would come down by that door to let in his accomplices as soon as it was all clear and right inside, so we just drew off and stood handy behind a s'rub. After about two hours, or maybe three, we heard a scratch like a diamond going it, but we weren't certain, so we just waited on till we see a glimmer of light in the conservatory. "Come on," says I to Sanders, and we crept up on our hands and knees, not to be seen, to the glass door. Presently the door opens, and we see two of 'em by an end of candle they

had to light 'em, and one with a bag on his shoulders. We made a rush, and a struggle ensued, in which I received severe bruises all over my person. We used our truncheons, and succeeded in getting 'em down. I had hold of one, but it turned out to be Sanders; and Sanders had hold of another, but it turned out to be me. However, we gave chase of the two others who had went off we didn't know where, and I was making my way back to the house to see if it was all right there, when Mr. Thane called to me, and I then took prisoner into custody. I turned my light on his face and knew him at once. I will swear to him. Sanders then signalling me for help, I left prisoner in custody of Mr. Thane, calling upon him in the name of the Queen.'

'I had nothing on but my slippers and a dressing-gown,' said Mr. Thane, appealing to the magistrates for commiseration.

The clerk pointed his pen at Jennings to proceed.

'I joined Sanders, who was up by the gap in the fence. He said he had seen the man with the bag. I said I would have a look for him along by the palings while he guarded the gap. We had been on the watch maybe half an hour or so, when Sanders again sang out to me, and at the same time I heard a struggle taking place. I turned on my lantern, and cried out I was coming.'

'You ran to his assistance?'

'Yes, sir, and I ran up against a tree, it bein' so thick, which pulled me up for a moment. I heard the fighting pretty close at hand, and just as I started forwards I heard the pistol go off, and recognised the prisoner.'

'How did you recognise the prisoner?' asked Mr. Beeton.

'Partly by the flash of his pistol, and partly by turning my lantern on him.'

'How far was he from you at the time?'

'About as far as I am from you now, sir.'

'That is about three yards.'

'I won't swear to it.'

'To the best of your belief, about three yards?'

'Yes, sir, to the best of my belief.'

'Yet the moment before you had run against a tree, after turning on your bull's eye, owing to the fog being so thick that you couldn't see it.'

The constable stuck his thumb in his belt, and covered his confusion with a look of indignation.

'Sanders told you he had seen the man with the bag,' said one of the magistrates; 'had the prisoner got the bag when you saw him?'

Jennings paused a moment, and then, with the smile of self-gratification which a man has

in avoiding a pitfall of cross-examination, he replied :

'It was the man who broke away first who had the bag ; not the prisoner.'

'Will you swear that the man had not got the bag ?'

'Yes, I will swear to that.'

'And you will swear that you recognised the prisoner at three yards by the flash of his pistol and the light of your lantern ?' put in Mr. Beeton.

'I will swear to the prisoner being the man who fired the pistol.'

I thought my solicitor's eyebrows would touch the parting of his hair, as, with a gentle shake of the head and a smile, he bent down to make a note.

The next witness examined was Mr. Thane. Asked how he came to suffer his prisoner to escape, he explained that he was not a robust man, that he was suffering from a complication

of ailments, and had nothing on but slip-shoes and a dressing-gown, and that he had handed me over to Major Cleveden to lock up in the tool-house, under the belief that as a military man, and a man of great physical strength and vigour, the Major was better able than he to guard a desperate ruffian like me.

'Where is Major Cleveden? Why is he not here?' asked one of the magistrates.

The clerk explained that the Major had left the Cedars, where he had been staying as a visitor, and that he was not to be found at his London address.

'Yes, he left my house yesterday morning early,' said Mr. Thane. 'I think it right to state that I was exceedingly annoyed by his want of proper care in guarding the prisoner after I had confided him to his care. I looked upon it as a breach of trust which might involve me in serious difficulties. It was, in my opinion,

not the conduct of an officer and a gentleman, and I told him so.'

'And he left your house at once!' said a magistrate who had himself the air of an old military man.

There was some further discussion, and then I was asked what I had to say in reply to the charge made against me; whereupon my solicitor rose and said that we reserved our defence.

That left the magistrates no course but to commit me for trial; and committed I was.

CHAPTER VIII.

TAKEN TO NEWGATE.

I was taken to the House of Correction at Wandsworth, to await my trial at the next assizes to be held at the Old Bailey. The same afternoon a warder ushered Mr. Beeton into my cell.

'We have no time to lose, William Smith,' said he; 'the assizes open on the thirteenth.'

'I'm glad of it,' said I. 'I wish it were all over and my fate decided.'

'It must be an anxious time for you, of course; but you may look forward with something like confidence to an acquittal on both counts.'

'Do you really think so?' I asked, in a tone of mingled hope and doubt.

'With regard to the graver charge, I have not the slightest doubt. No jury in the world would convict you of murder on the unsupported evidence of that man Jennings. His animus is obvious. You made an enemy of him by rejecting his friendly advance on Richmond Hill. He set you down for a bad lot, and his opinion was confirmed by finding you attempting to escape from the house. He may be honestly convinced that you did shoot his comrade Sanders, but it is clearly the hallucination of a man dominated by confirmed prejudice. What man, outside of fiction, could recognise another by the flash of a pistol, and that through nine feet of dense fog? What murderer, after killing his antagonist, would wait for the light of a bull's-eye to be turned on his face? Police-constable Jennings is convicted by his own lie. That part of his

evidence which is true is equally in your favour. The lie will acquit you of murder; the truth will acquit you of being concerned in the burglary. His statement with regard to finding your boots at the conservatory door, the doors and shutters all fast below, and the light in the servants' window, is worth a Jew's eye—and more—to you. Of course, you are still resolved to refuse any explanation of your being in the house.'

Here he paused in putting his gloves into his pocket, and bent his brows with an expression of the most fixed determination.

'Yes,' I answered firmly. 'Nothing on earth shall make me say a word about that.'

'For your own sake, I think that course advisable,' he said impressively. 'Of course, contempt of court is punishable, but that is a trifle. The judge will disapprove, but the jury will be influenced in your favour by your

refusal to implicate, and probably bring into disgrace, the person—whoever that person may be—whom you were visiting at this time. Well, now to business.'

With this he seated himself, and for best part of two hours he sat there cross-examining me, as if he believed me guilty, taking down my replies and making marginal notes upon them. Then he had not finished.

The next day he came again.

'William Smith,' he began, on this occasion, 'I am instructed to tell you that the person you visited at the Cedars is prepared to come forward at the trial, and give a full explanation, and supply a satisfactory reason for your being there on the night of the murder. I need not tell you that this statement must exonerate you entirely on the charge of being there with burglarious intent.'

My eyes filled with tears, and I could not speak for the emotion that choked me, as I

thought of the sacrifice my dear wife was prepared to make for me.

'The person goes further than that, even,' continued Mr. Beeton; 'she will most certainly make that statement, unless you expressly forbid it.'

'I do forbid it,' I cried vehemently.

'Quite right. William Smith. I myself have forbidden it in your interests and in my own—for my professional reputation is concerned in getting you off. And I say once more, emphatically, that your most expedient course at the trial will be the close adherence to that reticence you yourself suggested. Naturally the person in question is in very terrible anxiety concerning your fate. My hands will be strengthened considerably if I can convey to this person a decision on your part which may obviate a rash outburst at the trial on the part of—hem!—that person.'

'Will she be there?' I gasped.

'I fear nothing will keep that person away. Our chief hope lies in that person keeping silent.'

'Tell her,' I said, 'that if my life depended upon it, I would not have her break our secret.'

'I will tell her that your life *does* depend upon her keeping the secret, William Smith.'

And so he sat down as before, and went on with his interminable questioning; but for some time I could not fix my ideas upon the subject, for thinking of my dear Hebe, her suffering and her love. Nor could I think of anything else when he had gone, and that night I slept as sweetly on my wooden bed as if all my troubles were ended.

'The person who is so greatly interested in you,' said Mr. Beeton the next day, 'wishes to see you.'

I could not repress a cry of joy. Oh, if I could only see her once more, only let her see

how much I loved her now, I should not mind what sentence was passed upon me.

'But I have begged that person to forego the meeting. Better meet afterwards than run the risk of never meeting again.'

My heart sank like a stone in my breast.

'It is most dangerous and inadvisable. Why? Because, to obtain a sanction from the authorities, we should have to show that the cause of justice was furthered by this meeting, which could only be done by revealing the fact on which your very life depends. If you respect the future happiness of that person, you must decline the interview.'

It was a hard struggle to agree to this, but I was persuaded by my good solicitor to forego that one happiness—possibly the last that might be offered.

Mr. Beeton brightened up considerably when I had made the sacrifice.

'I will give you my reasons after the trial,

if, happily, they do not come out in the course of it,' said he.

I sat upon my bed dejected, picturing to myself how she might have rendered my cell a very paradise by her presence.

'The prosecution are getting a good show of witnesses, but they can do us no harm,' he said. 'Amongst them they have got the woman in whose house you lodged. Your old clothes will probably be brought to you in order that you may be identified more fully. Put 'em on. You'll look more like a servant's visitor in them than in your new clothes.'

He was not quite so bright the next day.

'They have subpœnaed Major Cleveden,' he said, his brows wrinkling as if he felt a twinge of toothache. 'I've seen him, and I don't quite like the look of him.'

Nothing could have more surprised me than this statement.

'As a witness,' he explained, answering

my look of astonishment. 'No, I do not like the look of him.'

'If you knew all,' I said, 'you would think otherwise. He has proved incontestably his devotion to——'

'Yes. I know whom you mean,' he said, drawing his thin hand down his long jaws, and caressing his chin reflectively. 'I know also that a want of caution on his part might involve him in this affair, with very serious consequences to himself. He might even lay himself open to the charge of being an accessory. Nevertheless, I do not like the look of him. What do you know about him, William Smith?'

'No more than I have told you half a dozen times.'

'I mean, what is your personal opinion of the Major's character?'

'I think him a chivalrous gentleman.'

''M, yes; that's just what I feared. Your

chivalrous men stick at nothing—never weigh the consequences of an act where their principles are concerned.

'"Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do or die."'

I should never have dreamed of this hard-headed man of law quoting poetry.

'If he hadn't been a chivalrous man he would have kept out of the way till this trial was over; instead of which he goes day after day to his club—looking for his subpœna, I suppose. Well, come on; we must finish this morning. Your case will be called to-morrow, and we will hope for the best. If that old idiot had only crossed the Channel!' he murmured, in a hardly audible undertone, as he flicked off his gloves.

The stolid warder who was ever present at our consultations had taken a kindly view of my case, and descended now and then to

jocosity. In this spirit he came into my cell early the following morning and said :

'She's come for you !'

'She !' I exclaimed, thinking of my wife. and springing to my feet, wild with joy.

'Maria,' he explained.

'Maria !' I echoed, in perplexity.

'I can see you're not an old hand,' he said. 'I should have said your carriage is at the door. Well, I wish you good luck,' he added, giving me his hand.

Then two officers came and led me off to the van that was to carry me to Newgate.

CHAPTER IX.

MY TRIAL IS BEGUN.

The court was full of people, yet the moment I stepped into the dock I caught sight of my poor wife. She was dressed in cheerful colours: I knew she had chosen them in preference to a more sombre and perhaps more suitable dress with the hope of inspiriting me. Yet her deadly pale face showed how little her heart was in accord with this show of hope. As our eyes met her lips parted: I could fancy she breathed my name. Then the anxiety disappeared before a smile, as if she bade me have courage—a smile which I alone saw, for every eye was turned upon me.

She sat near the judge; her father was

there. Between him and Hebe sat another lady, five or six years older than she, darker and far less beautiful, but yet sufficiently like for one to see that they were sisters. I had never before seen her, though I had heard much of her sweet disposition and tender wisdom from Hebe. Her name was Helen; she had lived all her life in India with her father. I saw that her hand touched Hebe's, which led me to believe then that she knew our secret. On the other side of my wife sat the Major—faultless in dress, clean cut and upright, the very type of a gallant officer, scrupulous in all things, great and small. He looked more anxious than when I had seen him in the tool-house, but he still maintained the self-possession of a man of the world—of a gentleman whose consideration for the feelings of others comes before self-interest. Even at that moment he found something to say to Hebe that drew her attention from me.

When I turned my eyes from them, I was dazed by the number of faces turned towards me—the strangeness of everything. I recognised no one else in the court until my old enemy, the constable Jennings, was in the witness-box under examination. He repeated the evidence he had given at the examination, and had it all his own way until a gentleman in a gown and wig, who sat next to my solicitor, got up. This was my counsel. At first he spoke with a bland and genial manner, as if he entirely agreed with everything. In this way he drew Jennings out, and got from him a full statement as to the examination of windows and doors prior to finding my boots.

'You and Sanders went round the house and carefully examined all the windows and doors ?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Then you found the boots ?'

'Yes, sir.'

'There was nothing to lead you to suppose that there had been infraction?'

'No, sir.'

'Otherwise you would not have withdrawn and waited best part of three hours for the burglars to appear?'

'No, sir.'

'Quite so. There were no lights on the ground-floor—only the night-light burning in Miss Thane's room on the first-floor?'

'There was a light in the servants' room on the second-floor.'

'You swear to that?'

'Yes, I swear to that. Sanders and me knew there was something up when we see that.'

'Now, when you captured the prisoner, how long did it take you to identify him as the man you had followed from Richmond Hill?'

'I recognised him the moment I got my lantern on his face.'

'Not before?'

'No, sir; it was impossible, being that thick.'

'How long did it take you to throw your light on his face?'

'Not a minnit.'

'The prisoner stood still at the time?'

'He was forced to it: I had him by the collar.'

'If you had not held him by the collar it would have been another matter?'

My counsel stuck his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets and spoke jocosely.

'Why, no, sir; if I hadn't a-held him he'd a-bolted, and I shouldn't have got the chance of seeing him.'

The constable looked very well satisfied with himself and the laughter that followed

his observation. My counsel waited until the murmur was perfectly hushed.

'I suppose the fog was about as thick in the spinney as you found it on the lawn?'

'Yes, sir.'

'You say you were about three yards from the prisoner when he shot Sanders?'

'About that, sir.'

'You recognised him at once by the flash of the pistol?'

'And the light of my lantern.'

'You don't think you could have identified him through nine feet of thick fog by the flash of the pistol alone?'

'No, sir.'

'The flash of the pistol occurred pretty soon after the report that directed your attention to the spot, I suppose?'

'Immediate, sir.'

'Now,' impressively, 'will you swear you

had not your hand on the collar of the prisoner at the moment he fired at Sanders ?'

'I was nine foot off, sir !'

'Then how was it that you saw him, when you told us just now that if you had not held him by the collar on the lawn you would never have got the chance of seeing him at all ?'

The laugh was on the other side now, and the constable was ill at ease.

'You had made up your mind that it was the prisoner who fired the shot ?' suggested the counsel, in a bantering tone.

'No,' retorted the vexed Jennings; 'for I believed the prisoner was locked up in the tool-house.'

'Yes, I think we shall prove that you did believe that. Stand down.'

The under-gardener was then called. He said, in answer to counsel :

'I heard the shot fired and ran up. Mr.

Jennings, the policeman, told me his mate was shot.'

'Did he say by whom?'

'I think he said the man with the swag had done it.'

'Are you sure he did not say the man with the bag?'

In the previous examination, Jennings had told how Sanders spoke to having seen the man with the bag—the man who had escaped from the conservatory.

'I can't swear to that, sir. He might have said the man with the bag.'

'Will you swear that he did not tell you Sanders had been shot by the man he had left in your master's custody?'

'Yes, I will take my oath he didn't.'

'Will you take your oath he said nothing whatever about the prisoner?'

'I'm not certain he didn't say he had collared one of 'em and locked him up.'

Other servants were called, who had run up on hearing the shot, but none would swear that Jennings had said a word about my being the murderer, though all agreed that when it was known I had escaped, he had declared he knew it was I who had fired the pistol.

Some inhabitants of Ham were called next. They swore to having seen two men, who looked like labourers out of work, hanging about the village for some days previous to the burglary. Asked in turn if I were one of the men, all answered in the negative, and declared they had never seen me before. Then my landlady was put in the box. It was difficult to keep her to the point. Again and again she tried to explain that, although she had threatened to round on me, she would not have come up against me if she had not been served with a blue paper. She did her best for me, telling how I behaved myself most 'espectably—never swearing nor drink-

ing like most cabinet-makers; but I was a bit too proud for my station, and dreadfully pinched, to be sure. She had seen me starving and starving worse every day, and foresaw it would end 'like what it does with most poor folks when they can't bear hunger no longer.' Had seen me go out about nine o'clock in the clothes I now wore, and saw me come home without my hat, and my clothes all in a mess of yellow mud, and goloshes on my feet.

'As if he had fallen in a ditch,' suggested my counsel.

'Jest that, sir. And he had a lot of gold on the table, and went out in a flanning suit. Soon after that a gentleman called, very anxious to see him or know where he might be found.'

Asked if she saw the gentleman in court, she pointed out the Major at once.

Then she told how I came home in the

afternoon in another disguise, and having read the paper left by the gentleman, jumped at once into a cab and drove off.

The prosecution in cross-examination asked if my clothes were in the condition she now saw them when I left them behind.

'No, sir,' she replied. 'I brushed 'em up decent, I will not deny.'

'You thought they might get him into trouble, and you brushed them, feeling kindly towards him ?'

'Yes, sir, and,' with the tenderness she had once before shown me, 'I'm sorry to see him here now.'

The shipping agent testified to my taking a berth for America—to my anxiety to get away the next day, to my paying for a telegram to secure a berth, and to my inquiring about trains to Liverpool, adding :

'I told all this to the detective who came to make inquiries—that was about an hour

after prisoner left. I told the detective I had seen him go into the outfitter's over the way.'

The outfitter added his testimony.

The servants discharged by Mr. Thane, under examination, scornfully declared they knew nothing about me, and had never before seen me. The most pert, a pretty housemaid, said:

'Do you think I would keep company with such a fellow as that?'

I was glad to see the impression this made, for how could Hebe be suspected of being the wife of a man whom even a servant scorned to regard as a sweetheart?

'You were discharged,' said my counsel, 'because your master believed you could.'

'Mr. Thane believed that all ten of us kept company with him. I defy the prisoner to say I ever spoke a word to him.'

'He does not intend to implicate any one of you, you will be glad to hear.'

The housekeeper described the position of the servants' rooms.

'The staircase leading from the second-floor where these rooms are is lit by a window overlooking the veranda, I believe?' said the counsel.

'Yes; there is a window on the first-floor landing.'

'When you went down to Miss Thane's room, did you find that window open?'

'Yes.'

'The prisoner would have to pass under Miss Thane's window to reach that part from which he fell when he was taken?'

'Yes, sir.'

This concluded the examination of the servants. I think it was the judge who asked if the defence did not intend to cross-examine them further, with a view to finding which—if any—was acquainted with me.

'No, my lord,' said my counsel, rising;

'the prisoner emphatically declines to say anything which may implicate any person in Mr. Thane's household, although it has been strongly represented to him that he may by that means clear himself from the charge of being in the house with burglarious intent.'

There was a murmur of applause, which the judge deprecated with a quick movement of his hands, and the court then rose for lunch. Up to this point all had gone in my favour. There was colour in Hebe's face now. Her eyes flashed encouragement as I glanced towards her. As I passed out of the court I heard one barrister say to another:

'Not guilty. Can't convict on that evidence.'

CHAPTER X.

MY TRIAL IS ENDED.

Major Cleveden was the first witness called on the return of the court. He was perfectly calm, and gave his evidence in clear, sharp tones that could be heard by everyone. I could fancy his giving the order to advance upon an enemy with just such an unflinching yet serious mien.

'You were a visitor staying in the house of Mr. Thane on the night in question, I believe, Major Cleveden?'

'Yes. I occupied a room on the first floor in the back of the house overlooking the lawn.'

'You were the first to open a window after the alarm given by the constable?'

'I believe so.'

'The whistle awoke you from your sleep?'

'No; I was dressed and reading at the time.'

'The constable has sworn that there was but one light in the back of the house—that in Miss Thane's room.'

'It is possible there was but one light at the time he referred to in his evidence. I put out my light on first going to bed. It was some time after that, being unable to sleep, I rose and relit it in order to read.'

A gentleman sitting beside the counsel half rose and spoke a few words to him; he nodded and continued his examination.

'Now, what did you do when you learnt that there were burglars in the house?'

'I went to see if I could be of any service to the ladies of the house.'

'That is what one would expect of you, Major. And then——?'

'I returned to my room.'

'At that time was the scuffle going on below in the conservatory?'

'No; that was all over. It was quite quiet below.'

'How did you know that—the servants and women must have been making a considerable commotion above?'

'I made my observation from the window.'

'You looked out and saw that it was all still?'

'Yes.'

'Now, while you were looking out of the window, did you see nothing of the prisoner on the veranda?'

'Yes, I saw the prisoner on the veranda.'

'What distance was he from you?'

'He was close to me. I could have laid my hand upon him.'

'But you did not lay your hand upon him?'

'No.'

'Did you raise an alarm or call attention to him?'

'No.'

'That is *not* what one would have expected of you, Major. May I ask why you let him go?'

'Because I did not feel myself called upon to prevent his escape.'

'You were sufficiently interested in him, however, to go down and see what became of him when he dropped from the veranda?'

'Yes.'

'You were also sufficiently recovered from your apathy to charge yourself with the safe-keeping of the prisoner?'

'I did charge myself with that responsibility.'

'Mr. Thane gave you a lamp, and you took the prisoner into a tool-house in the shrubbery?'

'Yes.'

'How long did you guard the prisoner there before he escaped?'

'About twenty minutes.'

Some questions were put as to our relative positions in the tool-house, etc., and then the counsel continued:

'Now, Major, will you tell me how the prisoner contrived to escape?'

Upon this the counsel for the defence rose quickly and said:

'The witness is not compelled to give any answer that may incriminate himself. If it can be proved that the prisoner committed murder, and that he escaped by the culpable negligence of witness, charged with his safe-keeping, witness is liable to prosecution as an accessory to the murder.'

A sharp discussion followed, and then the counsel for the prosecution proceeded :

'We will waive that question, and supposing that the prisoner found means to get his hands free from the handcuffs found in the tool-house, and then by violent means overcame your resistance——'

The Major interrupted him.

'Prisoner used no violence whatever,' he said quietly.

My counsel again rose to put him upon his guard : but silencing him as he had the counsel for the prosecution, the Major said :

'I have no wish to evade the consequences of what I have done. I say again, the prisoner used no violence whatever. I myself removed the handcuffs from his wrists.'

'Your candour commands respect,' said the counsel, with a note of triumph. 'And I expect you with equal candour to state why you liberated him.'

'I liberated him because I knew him to be guiltless of the crime for which he had been taken into custody.'

'What reason had you to presume that he was guiltless ?'

'I knew that he had come to the house to visit his wife.'

'You knew that his wife was an inmate of Mr. Thane's household ?'

'Yes.'

'Had you seen prisoner previous to finding him on the veranda under your window ?'

'Yes.'

'Where ?'

'As he passed the library-door on his way from the conservatory to the stairs.'

'Did he see you there ?'

'No. When I rose to relight my lamp I found I had no vestas. I knew I had left my box downstairs. I went down to fetch them. A light was burning in the hall-lamp. The

library was quite dark. While I was in there the prisoner passed.'

'Was he alone?'

'No; his wife led the way.'

'Can you tell us the woman's name?'

'I decline to do so. The prisoner has set an example in the course he has taken which I should be base indeed to go from.'

'The prisoner may have a particular reason for his reticence.'

'So have I: she is a woman.'

A murmur ran through the court; but a glance at my solicitor showed that he did not share this sentiment of approval.

'Had you seen prisoner previous to that occasion?'

'No.'

'Then how did you know he was her husband?'

'I did not know it until she came to the tool-house and told me.'

The Major was closely pressed to give particulars, but not a word did he say that could in any way identify Hebe as my wife. Giving up this line of attack, the counsel proceeded to examine the witness respecting his movements the next day.

'Now, Major, the day after this affair you showed yourself particularly anxious to communicate with the prisoner, and the result of your communication was that he bolted at once. A liaison between prisoner and one of Mr. Thane's servants is not such a terrible affair as to account for your excessive solicitude in preventing its discovery. Had you not reason to fear that his apprehension involved something more than this discovery ?'

'I had.'

'Had you not reason to apprehend that the arrest of prisoner would condemn an innocent and unfortunate woman to suffer for the rest of her life the shame and degradation

of being known as the widow of a condemned murderer ?'

The Major closed his lips for a moment, and then said distinctly :

' I had.'

' You had reason to believe that it was he who shot Sanders ?'

' Yes, I had.' was the reluctant answer.

' Did you know that he was armed ?'

' No.'

' He said something, then, to lead you to suppose that he would resort to desperate measures to save his wife from disgrace ?'

' Yes.'

' Do you remember what words he used ?'

The Major paused and turned his eyes to me. We looked fixedly at one another. I felt then that I was a man, and could bear the consequences of my acts as well as he could bear his—that I would suffer anything rather than drag Hebe down into this misery. He

must have read in my eyes what was in my mind, for he turned then to the counsel and answered clearly:

'I do remember his words. He said: "I will escape; my wife has suffered enough by loving me too well. She shall suffer no more. I will not be retaken alive if I have the use of my hands."'

'You had not then removed his handcuffs?'

'No.'

'Yet, conscious of the significance of his words, you set him free?'

'Yes; for in his place I would have done what he did.'

There was a dead silence, only broken by a little click below. I looked down. My solicitor was toying with a quill pen. The composure of his brows, the absence of expression in his face, told me that he saw there was nothing more to be done.

The Major went down from the witness-

box and took his seat beside Hebe. He was as pale as she now.

The evidence was all taken, and then speeches were made. I remember that my counsel spoke eloquently in my defence; scornfully disposing of the constable's evidence as reckless perjury, and called upon the jury to reconcile to their conscience the conviction of a man upon the construction to be put on a few words uttered in haste and excitement. Had the Major, he said, valued a man's life as he valued a woman's honour, he would never have repeated a phrase which jeopardized the existence of a fellow-creature and menaced his wife with that lifelong misery and shame which he, in a wiser and better moment, had endeavoured to shield her from. 'And it is not only that witness,' he added, extending his hand towards the Major, 'who must answer for the life of an innocent man and the shameful widowhood of an innocent

woman; you also are answerable, you men of the jury, who have to judge the character and actions of this man dispassionately and without prejudice.'

When the Judge came to sum up, he at first seemed to me to take a very lenient and favourable view of my case. He said that the evidence tended very strongly to show that I was not in any way connected with the burglars who broke into Mr. Thane's house. The mere fact of my having a large sum of money after the burglary proved nothing. Gentlemen's servants were well paid, and it was but natural that a wife, seeing her husband in the deplorable condition I presented, should hand over to him her savings. The statement I had made with regard to finding a ladder attached to the wall, to my falling in the ditch, to being overtaken by one of the housebreakers, who admitted having been in the neighbourhood for ten days with his ac-

complice 'Hooky,' was all corroborated by the evidence of those who had found the ladder still attached to the wall, with indications on the clayey edge of the ditch below that a man had fallen there, and this was further corroborated by the statement of the woman with whom I lodged; and my description of the man's communication to me was equally borne out by the residents in Ham, who had noticed these men hanging about. There was, therefore, no reason to discredit my story so far, but there was still this question to be answered: Did the prisoner find the ladder and get over the wall *before Sanders was shot or after?* With regard to the evidence of the constable Jennings, there was strong reason for doubting its accuracy. Without committing perjury, he might state that which was not true, a paradox which all could understand who have observed how strongly some men's convictions are biased by their con-

ceptions. The most damning evidence against the prisoner was undoubtedly that reluctantly given by Major Cleveden, or perhaps he should with greater justice say those words out of the prisoner's own mouth which the gallant officer had very properly repeated in his evidence. The jury must realize that here was a man suddenly set at liberty with the fixed and desperate determination to make the most of the chance afforded him, inflamed with a desire to shield his wife from the degrading consequences of his arrest—a desire stimulated by a sense of gratitude for the money she had given him to start possibly in a new career, and by the misplaced generosity on the part of the Major. They must ask themselves, what would be the result of a man so wrought finding himself suddenly taken by the police? Whether in that moment he drew his pistol upon the officer in a sudden impulse of self-defence or not was beyond the

question they had to deal with. If they believed that he had the intention when he quitted the tool-house of getting off at all hazards, then the killing of the policeman afterwards, no matter in what way, must be considered as murder with premeditation.

Again I was taken down as the jury retired to consider their verdict. There was pity in the look of every face I gazed into. There was no hope for me ; I knew that.

Again I was led back into the dock. The jurymen were in their places. I noticed that they alone kept their eyes from me. It must be an awful thing to look in the face of a man whom by a word you have sent to the gallows.

Then in dead silence the foreman of the jury was asked if they were all agreed, and he answered, in a voice that scarcely reached my strained ear, that they were agreed. He was questioned again, and said that on the

charge of burglary they found me 'Not Guilty.'

On this there was a quick murmur, but it died away almost at once, for all were breathless to know what verdict they gave on the graver count. Then the foreman spoke again, and said that on the charge of murder they found me 'Guilty.'

Again a hum of smothered exclamation ran through the court; but as the Judge put on the black cap a piercing scream rose from amongst the spectators. A woman had fainted. At first I thought the cry had come from Hebe, but when I turned my eyes that way I saw her sitting with her head bowed and her hands clasped in her lap.

The Judge waited until there was perfect silence, and then, looking at me, began to deliver sentence. The woman in the hall broke out into hysterical laughter. The Judge paused. In that instant Hebe, as white as a

ghost, sprang to her feet, and turned as if to address him. The Major checked her, taking her arm and whispering hurriedly.

She stood thus, gazing at me as if her reason were gone. Meanwhile the woman had been taken from the court, and the Judge continued. I did not hear what he said. I saw nothing, realized nothing, but that my poor wife was standing there like a corpse before me.

As the Judge ceased to speak she fell back in the Major's arms.

'If one woman goes off, another is bound to follow suit,' I heard someone say as I was led away.

CHAPTER XI.

A PROSPECT OF REPRIEVE.

At first I was too bewildered by the crowd of ideas that had been forced upon me to feel the terror of my situation. When I tried to fix my thoughts upon one object and distinguish it from the rest I found it impossible. It was as if a host of people were shouting at me simultaneously; as if a number of pictures were being passed rapidly before my eyes; as if I had fallen from a great height, and was called upon to give an intelligible account of all I had heard and seen.

With a strange feeling of apathy I sat down on the edge of my bed, and set myself to count the bricks in the wall under the

coating of whitewash between the door and the side. After awhile, my eyes dazzled with the bright reflection of the gas upon the lime, a feeling of sickness came over me, and I sank my head in my hands. Then, just as the figure of the sun will present itself when you shut your eyes after looking at it, Hebe's white face, as she dropped back into the Major's arms, came before me. I see it now as I saw it then—the white, upturned face and parted lips standing out in strong relief against the Major's black coat.

'What has she done that she should suffer?' I asked myself, conscious for the first time of the injustice of this punishment. 'What crime have I committed that I should be here?'

With this a feeling of savage rebellion fired my heart—a feeling of bitter hatred towards heaven and earth and all mankind. I cursed the Judge, whose impartiality had forcibly won upon me during the trial. It was the furious

instinct of a trapped beast, who will snap in his pain even at the hand that would unbend the spring.

I was in this mood when the chaplain came to visit me. I did not raise my head when the door opened. I only knew he was present when he laid his hand on my arm. Then I looked up quickly, with the sudden conception that Hebe might have found her way hither to bid me 'good-bye' for ever. Seeing his black coat and shaven lip, I buried my face again.

It was only a gaol officer, paid, like the warders, to administer what humanity could not deny. Humanity! What had humanity to do with me?

He spoke to me of God's love and mercy. I turned away with a brutal laugh. Where were the love and mercy of that Omnipotence which suffered two innocent creatures to be plunged into shame and misery?

Then he told of the Divine pardon accorded

to repentant sinners, and begged me to pray with him for forgiveness while there was yet time.

'I have nothing to pray for,' I cried; 'least of all for forgiveness. I am innocent.'

He showed no surprise. Many another found guilty, maybe, had professed innocence in that very cell.

'Which of us can say he is blameless?' he said gently. 'Though you are innocent of this crime, yet surely there are other sins for which you would ask grace before your lips are closed for ever.'

I thought of Hebe; of the last meeting in her room; of the suffering I had then inflicted upon her; of the final shock that had struck her down before my eyes in the court; of the lifelong sorrow and shame to which I had doomed her for the want of manly courage to cut my way through the meshes of misfortune that had fallen upon me.

'Which of us is blameless?' I asked. 'Certainly not I!'

The chaplain spoke on, and I listened patiently. It was not his words that moved me—my thoughts were too busy to take in their sense; it was the tone that appealed to my heart, reviving memories of the past. Something in the clerical accent, maybe, called back to my mind that morning when the old Vicar first brought Hebe to see my carving. I seemed to hear him moralizing upon art, and the proper use to be made of those gifts with which Providence endows a chosen few—pointing his homely homily with instances of great men risen from estates lowlier than mine; while Hebe stood over my work with bent head, in the evening glow, her face catching its tender flush, her dark-fringed eyes fixed wonderingly on the carving. I realized it all—the long workshop that had been my father's, then mine, with its low,

latticed windows; the hollyhocks in the garden; the swallows shrilly whistling as they swept in wide circles above the dwelling-house; the shavings on the floor, the chips on the bench, the resinous smell of the pine freshly laid up to season on the crossbeams overhead. I stood there again by the bench, toying with a chisel, listening now to the simple old man, and taking in all he said as a gospel, applying his illustrations to myself, with an eager longing, a feverish impatience to have done with press-making, and to be rising through my art to fame; and then forgetting him and myself as I glanced at Hebe, whose beauty was a new revelation. Hebe! I saw her again and again. Picture after picture came before me—our first meeting alone, and those that followed. I felt once more that delirium of joy when I knew that she loved me, the exultant pride with which we built high castles in the air, palaces of

art in which she was to reign princess, and inspire me with ever new subjects for carvings that could never cease to reflect her beauty and sweetness.

The chaplain paused: the charm was broken. I awoke from the dream of love and happiness and palaces to see the gas, with a dim halo about it, burning against the blinding wall. All was gone—all, all!—every hope of joy, every memory of hope. Yet, as I drew my fingers over my eyes, Hebe's white face came back to my sight, no longer pink with the glow of the summer sun, but white and ghastly—her wide eyes fixed on me in a last look of agony and despair.

Where was she now? Stretched upon her bed, asking what was to become of her, the widow of a man hanged on a gallows? No, no! Her soul ached not for herself, but for me; no self-pity flooded those dear eyes with tears. If she wept it was for my lost life.

My heart broke down, and tears, trickling through my fingers, fell upon the stone floor.

Then the chaplain, seeing me softened, begged me to follow his prayer.

'Yes,' said I meekly; 'I will pray.'

And so I dropped upon my knees, and, laying my arms on the bed, buried my face in them to hide the working of my face, and with grief and remorse and pity all tearing at my heart I prayed as well as I could that Heaven would have mercy upon my wife.

* * * * *

Ah! my next visitor was of another sort. Early the next morning in bustled Mr. Beeton, the solicitor—his eyelids up, his lips tightly closed down. Without a word he shook hands with me.

'Bad job, bad job!' said he presently. 'I said so—not to you, of course. Never does to send a man up for trial with despair in his face; but I told *him*. The moment I saw the

Major's attitude I said to him : " If you don't go out of the country for ten days, my client will go to penal servitude for life." Yet he stayed, the old fool!' he muttered under his breath, as he set down his bag. 'And as if,' he added, turning again to me, his brows overlapping with the intensity of his exasperation —'as if not content with showing off his chivalry—that's your word for it—showing off his chivalry for public admiration, he must go and let out what you said to him in the tool-house, with the construction he put upon it. That was the turning-point. Up to then everything was on our side; it was a moral certainty that we should get you off: conviction on the evidence as it stood was out of the question. He ruined us—dropped us clean into the hands of the enemy with his theatrical reticence and his theatrical display. It was as if he had planned it all out beforehand—as if he had done it all on purpose.

Done it on purpose!' he repeated musingly, as he regarded the floor, his head on one side, one brow up, the other down.

I was surprised at the solicitor's changed demeanour. Previously he had shown some sort of reserve, even a certain deference, in speaking to me; now all that was thrown off. It seemed to me only too significant. What need was there for the man to observe respect or attempt concealment in the presence of one condemned to end his life in a few days on the gallows?

'As if he had done it on purpose!' he repeated once more reflectively; then, suddenly casting one eye at me, he asked: 'What relation is he to Miss Hebe Thane?'

'None whatever.'

'None!' he said, in a tone of surprise. 'I thought he was her uncle.'

I turned away impatiently without responding. Why had he come here to trouble my

last hours, and excite me with a feeling of animosity at a time when I wished only to make peace with all men? Mr. Beeton took no notice of me—why should he?—but stood drawing his hand down his long face as he studied the floor, whilst I, taking the Bible from its shelf, seated myself on the plank-bed to read.

'Well,' said he, suddenly recovering his brisk, energetic manner, 'we mustn't lose time. Never mind about reading just now. You'll not be hanged this time.'

'What do you mean?' I gasped.

'Oh, your sentence will be commuted, of course. That's what I've come about. If we don't muddle it, you will get off with penal servitude for life; that in ordinary cases means twenty years' imprisonment. That's not insupportable. You will come out at forty, and at that age a man may yet hope for some enjoyment of life. If we do muddle it,

you'll get imprisonment for the whole term of your natural life. That is intolerable, and in my view considerably worse than being hanged at once, for you have nothing to live for—nothing to hope for. You will never lose sight of your prison walls till body and mind are worn out and you die.'

'How can that be avoided?' I asked, with breathless anxiety.

'I am about to show you. If we can make the Home Secretary believe, as I think we may, that you were convicted upon the misconception of certain words, uttered thoughtlessly in the excitement of the moment, that those words are open to quite a different construction, and that there was not sufficient motive to lead to the perpetration of such a crime, he will certainly remit your penalty to the utmost.'

'Do you think it possible to convince him of that?'

'I do. Thanks to the prosecution, it was made evident at the trial that your wife was a servant in Mr. Thane's house. Now, no sane man, as one of the papers has pointed out this morning, can believe that a young fellow, bearing the character for honest living and sober ways that your landlady gave you, would commit a murder merely to save his wife from losing her situation.'

'But——'

He checked me with a motion of his hand.

'I know what you would say: your wife is not a servant. That fact must be concealed. It is perfectly unnecessary to reveal that fact. To forego this chance of escape will be suicide on your part, and worse than that; for it is not only your life that is at stake, but the welfare of your wife. Now, will you second me in this effort?'

'Of course I will.'

'In that case you must not see your wife; you must not let her come here to see you.'

'Does she wish—has she asked to see me?' I faltered.

'Yes. I have tried to persuade her from it, showing her the danger. I have with difficulty prevailed upon her to wait until she hears from you before deciding.'

I heard this with a mingled thrill of joy and regret—joy in this testimony of her constant love; regret in the conviction that I must not see her. Yet to go away without seeing her once more—without a look or a word of farewell—I could not reconcile myself to that. Mr. Beeton, with his shrewd, experienced eyes, saw well enough what was passing in my mind, as I sat there grinding my palms together in the desperate struggle to overcome the longing of my heart.

'Understand fully,' said he, 'what you

expose us to by suffering your wife to come here. You betray the one fact on which the happiness of half a lifetime depends. If it is made known to the Home Secretary what your wife's station is, he will see at once a full and adequate motive for the murder. The loss of situation by a servant is comparatively nothing; the loss of station and her father's love by a young woman of beauty and gentle breeding——'

'Enough,' I muttered. 'I forbid her to come to me. Tell her so.'

'I will,' he said cheerfully. 'I'll put your command so strongly that she shall not be overruled by the impulse of her own heart. You've done what is sensible and right,' he added, taking up his bag and giving me his hand, 'and you may rely with something like certainty upon being a free man in twenty years—in twenty years,' he repeated, going towards the door. 'Always supposing,'

he added, suddenly stopping and looking back, as the warder turned the key—'always supposing that our friend, the Major, does not intervene.'

CHAPTER XII.

'OUR FRIEND, THE MAJOR.'

In the afternoon a warder told me I was to go with him to the consulting-room, where a visitor wished to see me. This room stands alone in a corridor. It is closed on all sides with thick plate-glass, impervious to sound, but open to the observation of the warders without. Here the prisoner usually consults with his solicitor; mine preferred the cell, his clients feeling 'more at home' there, as he told me with cynical frankness.

I saw that my visitor was the kind-hearted old Vicar, Mr. Northcote. He hastily blew his nose, and put his handkerchief away as I approached; but the signs of emotion were

yet in his face when I entered. His eyes were red and wet; his lips trembled as he tried to speak and failed; he could only stretch out his two hands to me with a look of unutterable sorrow.

The warder went outside, leaving the door open, as is customary when the prisoner is condemned and his visitor a personal friend.

I grasped the hands of my old friend, and we sat down in silence. He looked in my face for a minute, and then I knew not what he saw there that overcame him, but he broke down completely, turning away to hide the tears that ran down his cheeks.

The sight of the dear old fellow's grief unmanned me; for sympathy with us in our misfortune is sometimes harder to bear than the misfortune itself. The words I would have spoken choked me; and for a little while we sat there mute, clasping each other's hands tightly, while the reflection

occurred to me that this might be the last friendly grip I should ever feel.

'Tell me, Kit,' he said, suddenly facing me—'tell me, my boy, that you are innocent.'

'I swear I am innocent!' I replied.

'Thank Heaven for that,' said he devoutly. 'No one can command immunity from misfortune, but the knowledge that you are innocent must give you strength to meet it with resignation, and bear the bitterest blow with fortitude. It has lightened my heart, and will lighten one still more nearly bound to you than I am.'

'I hope it may,' I murmured.

'It will, Kit—it will!' he protested stoutly. 'The heart that loves you now must love you ever, and in that love find a constant spring of sweet reflection and solace. But I've not come to play the part of a spiritual comforter, my boy; no doubt

the chaplain of this great establishment is a far more able man in that respect than I; I am here to render you practical service if I can. We knew about it last night,' he continued, after a pause. 'A neighbour had been to London, and brought us the evening paper with a brief account of the trial. It was the first we had heard of it. As a rule, I avoid that kind of reading. I need not tell you how we felt—how we regretted that you had not sent for me. I might have done something for you, Kit. I could have told them all I knew about you: what an admirable workman you were; how well you conducted yourself in all things; how you stood by your old mother to the last, plodding on in the workshop when you were tempted to go where your genius would obtain better recognition. That must have counted for something, for surely a good son is never a bad

man. And all that I had to say in your favour could have been supported by Miss Thane, who doubtless would have been as willing as I to go into the witness-box. For she always took the deepest interest in all that concerned you, though you, of course, knew nothing about it, albeit Mrs. Northcote will have it that some romantic attachment existed between you of which we were kept in ignorance. You know what ladies are, Kit, when they get notions of this kind into their heads: there's no disabusing their minds of error. I came up by the first train, and as it was too early to see you, I went to Richmond, hoping to learn something from my dear Hebe about your poor wife.'

'Did you see her?' I asked.

'No. The house is shut up; the family gone away. That was a necessity, for I hear that Mr. Thane has dismissed all his servants.'

This was a relief.

'I knew, my dear fellow, that your wife's welfare must be your chief consideration, and I hoped that Hebe could tell me something about her. Indeed, I thought it might be one of her own maids whom she took from Feltenham that you had married.'

I shook my head.

'You are married, Kit?' he asked, with some anxiety.

'Yes—unfortunately for my wife.'

'Then that settles Mrs. Northcote!' said he, with a slight accent of triumph. 'The poor soul, sticking to her absurd hypothesis, contends that you were visiting Hebe that dreadful night, and finds an explanation of your reticence in the fact that you feared to involve her in your misfortune.'

I tried to laugh, as if the notion were ridiculous.

'You may assure Mrs. Northcote positively that I was at the Cedars not to visit Miss Thane, but my wife.'

'I will, and put an end to that nonsense,' said he decisively, striking the floor with his stick. Then, looking at me, his manner changed in an instant to its former tenderness; he exclaimed, in a tone of self-reproach: 'God forgive me! this is no time for such trifles. Come, Kit, we have to talk about your poor wife. Our first care must be to provide for her, and she *shall* be provided for, I promise you. There's a home in the Vicarage for her as long as we live, and I shall take care that she does not want after we are gone. You know me, my boy, and you know Mrs. Northcote—the best woman in the world at heart, but susceptible to errors of judgment, like any other. With us your wife shall never know want, nor hear a word of reproach against you;

for her secret, if she would guard it, shall be sacred in our keeping. She shall be our daughter as truly as if it had pleased Heaven to make you our son.'

I can but write his words as I remember them; it is impossible to describe the pathetic tenderness that made them eloquent. I tried to express the gratitude I felt.

'Not a word of that,' he cried, interrupting me as he slid his arm within mine and pressed it to his side; 'not a word. What has Providence given me all the good things of life for, but to use them to advantage; and how can I more profitably employ them than in providing for the welfare of one who, I doubt not, will love us in return, and be a comfort to us for the rest of our days?'

'Heaven bless you for this kindness!' I murmured, overcome by his generosity. 'Be

sure, sir, that if ever my poor wife is in need of help she will come to you. At present she is well cared for, and will not suffer want in addition to this blow so long as she is not known for the wife of a convicted criminal. I would tell you more—all indeed, but——'

'I know, I know,' he interrupted, giving my arm another affectionate squeeze. 'You have told me enough. Your wife's wishes must be considered before anything else. Far be it from me to take her from her friends for the gratification of my own desires; and if she knows that at any moment she will find a home—a cheerful home—as bright and happy as we can make it——'

'Oh, she already knows that, sir!'

'I am glad you told her that, Kit—glad you gave me credit for sympathy and a true affection. Now let us think about yourself.

Something must be done to obtain a reprieve —a respite.'

'My solicitor is doing everything that is possible in that way.'

'Does he give you any hope of succeeding?'

'Yes: he seems confident of obtaining the fullest possible remission of my sentence. I shall be let off with twenty years of penal servitude.'

'Why, this is comforting news indeed, Kit; it is almost more than I hoped for. You will still be a young man in twenty years.'

I buried my face in my hands to stifle the cry of despair that rose from my very heart as I thought of the twenty years that were gone and compared them with those that were to come. In a moment all the brightness of the past flashed upon me—the long days of careless happiness, the days of keen delight and buoyant hope — all these lay

behind me, lost for ever! Before me was nothing but the impenetrable gloom of blank despair.

'Have you no hope of mercy?' asked the Vicar, laying his hand on my shoulder.

'Do you call it mercy to spare the life of such a hopeless wretch as I? That robs me of my last hope. I can only wish that I were dead.'

'Is that your wife's hope, Kit?' asked my old friend gravely. 'Think of her, Kit—think that at this very moment she is praying that you may be spared to her. Think how her heart is aching with the fear that she may never see your face again.'

'Wouldn't it be better so? Degraded below the level of a slave, herded with the vilest of mankind, what shall I be at the end of twenty years?'

'Whatever you choose to make yourself, Kit Wyndham,' replied the Vicar, with more

sternness than I had ever seen him exhibit. 'If you give way to evil influences, you must become a brute; if you resist them, you will be a man—a better, a stronger man, more worthy of a woman's love than you are to-day. Courage, Kit, courage! Be a man, for the sake of your wife. Think of her love; wear it about your heart like a talisman that will give you strength to overcome the enemy, and bring you out triumphant from the struggle. Think of her counting the days and hours for your release, supporting the weary years with the confident hope of happiness to come, and, believe me, you will not have the heart to do ill. This weakness will pass away—ay,' said he, his voice trembling as the tears dropped through my fingers, 'it is past already. You will come out well from this ordeal, and amply compensate that loving wife for all her patient suffering.'

'I will be a man,' I said to him as we parted.

I was much happier when I went back to my cell. Over and over again I repeated what the good old Vicar had said to me. It gave me new life. I saw something now to live for. Hope shone brightly even through the long vista that lay before me. I was in this better mood the next morning when Mr. Beeton again visited me.

'It's all right,' he said cheerfully; 'we've petitioned the Home Secretary, and you'll get your commutation in a few days. It's a moral certainty.'

'I am glad of it.'

'Haven't seen the Major?'

'No.'

'Ashamed to show his face. No wonder. Good job if he continues to keep out of the way!'

But the Major was not ashamed to show

his face. I was taken up into the consulting-room to meet him just after Mr. Beeton left me. He looked anxious and ill; but there was no sign of shame, or regret even, on his thin, handsome face.

'We have made a great mistake, Mr. Wyndham,' he said, giving me his hand, 'and I wish to undo it if it is not too late.'

I was silent, not knowing to what mistake he referred.

'You behaved like a man of honour,' he continued, taking a seat; 'and you must not be strung up like a blackguard felon. We have made mistakes all round. It was a mistake to employ that fellow Beeton—a man, I am told, who is a disgrace to his profession, and whose very name is sufficient to damn the client who employs him. Mrs. Wyndham, of course, knew nothing of him; in her terrible anxiety she naturally sought

the first legal help suggested by the sergeant at the police-station. The next mistake was to follow his direction at the trial. No good end was ever yet achieved by wrong means.'

'What wrong means were employed?' I asked.

'Well, to begin with, the evidence on our side was used to mislead the jury, and certainly succeeded in throwing suspicion of complicity on some one of the servants, with the result that all the poor devils were discharged the next day, and their characters seriously damaged. We may look upon it as a trifle, but they don't, it's certain. And the last mistake is to suffer that rascal Beeton to petition the Home Secretary. I heard of that this morning. I have just come up from Brighton, where your wife is staying with her relations. That must ruin your chance of escape, as surely as Beeton is a rascal and the Home Secretary is a gentleman. Now,

Mr. Wyndham, I wish to undo this mischief, as I tell you, if I can.'

'What do you propose?' I asked.

'I propose to go to the Home Secretary myself. I am personally acquainted with him. He is a man of the utmost integrity, I need not tell you, and I am certain that, when he hears the whole truth, he will exercise his power to the utmost in your favour.'

'Is this my wife's wish?' I asked.

'She is too ill—too overwhelmed with trouble—to form a decision; she referred me to you—that is why I am here.'

'You will reveal all.'

'All—to the Home Secretary only. I shall tell him of your clandestine marriage, of your misfortune, and the position of your wife. He will see, then, that you were in some measure justified in the desperate means you took.'

'Major,' said I, 'do you believe that I shot that man?'

His hands were crossed on one knee, and his eyes fixed on the ground as he spoke. He lifted his head and looked at me in silence for a moment or two after I had put that question. He looked at me in perplexity, till suddenly a movement at the open door drew his attention to the warder standing there. Then a ray of intelligence passed over his face, and gave place to an expression of contempt and disdain as he once more fixed his eyes on me.

He thought I was pleading innocence by that question from the fear of the gallows. Rising from his chair he came close to me, and said in a low tone:

'I am sure of it; though for the first time I doubt the manliness of your motive. I shall go to the Home Secretary and tell him

what I believe to be the truth, be the consequences what they may.'

And without again offering me his hand he left me.

Two days after the order came for my removal, my sentence being commuted to penal servitude for the term of my natural life.

The Major had seen the Home Secretary, and I was fettered for life!

CHAPTER XIII.

'365' REALIZES HIS POSITION.

'FETTERED for life! fettered for life! fettered for life!' I said over and over again, to myself as I sat boxed up in the van that carried me away from Newgate. The words fell in with the beat of the horses' feet and the rattle of the wheels. 'Fettered for life! fettered for life! fettered for life!' I repeated, as I sat in my whitewashed cell, the throb of distant machinery making a rhythmic accompaniment. I remember that; nothing else made an impression on my numbed senses. I know now that I was photographed on my arrival, but I have no recollection of that or the other regulations to which I was submitted.

The governor came to me. He was a stout, thick-set man; had been a captain in the Navy, I believe; there were decision and firmness in his face, tempered with kindness.

'Well, my man,' said he, 'you have heard the rules read: do you comprehend them?'

I looked at him stupidly.

'Is there any question you wish to put to me?'

I shook my head.

'Come, rouse up. This lethargy won't do.' He paused, looking at me keenly; then, with a touch of pity, he pursued: 'I know it's hard for a man who has never been here before to realize his position, but the sooner he does the better it is for his personal comfort. Many men give trouble, and get into trouble themselves, because they cannot understand that they are beginning a new

life, and must conform with its requirements. You know the extent of your sentence.'

'Fettered for life!' I said.

'For the whole term of your natural life.'

'That is irrevocable.'

'Irrevocable in this sense: that no further appeal of your friends in your behalf can be considered. You *must* realize that, my man.'

'I shall live and die in prison. Nothing I can do will give me another day of freedom.'

'Not one. At the same time, I must tell you, your existence will be made tolerable, or a state of perpetual misery, by your good or bad conduct. Certain privileges are granted to prisoners, which may be withdrawn in the case of refractory men. The man who misbehaves himself is a fool—that is the teaching of a prison from beginning to end.'

He spoke to me at some length in this strain, and then, rising from the stool on which he had seated himself, he said:

'You will be allowed to see your friends —under certain conditions—when you have been here for three months. If you wish to write to them, you may do so at once.'

'Yes, I will write to them,' I said.

The warder brought me writing materials shortly afterwards. Then I sat down before my little shelf under the window, with the purpose of writing to my wife, but when I took up the pen I could find nothing to say. How could I lessen her misery and shame? What comfort could any words convey? It was as if I tried to find hope for myself in that life before us where no hope existed. For was she not still part of myself—a partner with me in this terrible fate—who also was fettered for life—to me? At one moment I thought I would write all that was in my heart, but when I had written 'My beloved wife,' I broke down. What need to add to her sufferings by betraying my own

agony of despair and regret?—and that was all that my heart had to tell. Hour after hour I sat idle before the sheet of paper, and when the gas was turned out, I had got no further than those three words.

In the night all the people I had known from my childhood came to bid me 'good-bye.' It was no dream; my ideas were too distinct and clear for that. Some friends came together; others singly. There was sorrow in all their faces; even in my enemies'. They could afford to pity me now. The Major came. There was pain in his face—the pain of a humane soldier standing over the slain after a battle. I bore him no ill-will. He had done his duty as conscience directed him. Believing me to have committed manslaughter, he had saved me from hanging, to spare my guiltless wife that shame.

While these came and went, my wife was

ever present. She sat beyond, with her young head bowed down, and her hands clasped upon her knees. When all were gone, she rose and came to my side, luminous in the darkness, the graceful outline of her body and small head clearly cutting the blackness beyond. I knew I should never, never see her again! I thought of the last night when she drew my face to hers and kissed me, and how, dull and insensible to her tenderness, possessed with malignant jealousy, I had suffered her to go without returning her kiss. Then I stretched up my arms to draw down to my trembling lips the dear face I could not see through my tears. But my head swam with the delirium of remorse; my hands fell like stones by my side; I was powerless. The thought that she might leave me without the last testimony of my passionate love—without one farewell blessing—recalled me to myself. I started up;

she was gone. All was darkness around me, save a narrow streak of light beneath the door. In vain I tried to conjure up that figure once more; no effort of imagination could recall her for one moment as I had seen her but a minute before.

I had figured myself in the position of a man who is told that within a certain time his disease must kill him—that science is incapable of prolonging his life; and now I asked myself if I were not already in another state of existence?—was it not my death-bed that my friends had gathered around? Was not that the last throe that convulsed me as my wife stood weeping over me? But, no; the agony remained; and under the perception that in one sense I was dead to the world, and all that made it dear to me, lay the terrible consciousness that I had yet to live with this stricken heart, dragging behind me the chain of dead hope. Oh, that

it had been as I had pictured it ; that I was at the last point of sickness ; that I was to die in a few days ! How long must I, healthy and vigorous, live on and suffer ? And my unhappy wife : must she sit for ever with her head bowed and her hands clasped in grief and pity ? Must the pretty smile never return to that young cheek ? Must she grow gray and wrinkled and feeble before the happy news was brought her that the convict—her husband—was no more ?

An idea fell upon my gloomy mind like a flash of light—Suicide ! Why should I live ? Why not put an end at once to her sufferings and mine ? Death by my own hand was different from that by the hangman's. It would leave no endless legacy of shame to my wife. For my own sake she could not regret my death. With resignation would come peace of mind, and in time she would smile again, and be capable of happiness

such as I had never brought her. In a few months I might be almost forgotten—wholly forgiven. But if I lived on, might not the sense of her own lifelong misfortune embitter her against the one who had brought it upon her? Might she not cease to love me, and, ceasing to love, hate me? She would live in endless dread of discovery as long as I existed; the fear that someone should find out our secret marriage, and proclaim her the wife of a convict, must make her look with dread upon every fresh face—listen in terror to any chance allusion. It must goad her to a pitch of madness, in which she herself would reveal all to be quit of that perpetual torture. And then—what then? Her father, if he should not send her away, would make life with him so unendurable that flight and dependency upon the charity of strangers must be preferable. As these thoughts, and a thousand others, whirled through my brain, I groped

round the dense cell, instinctively seeking for some instrument with which to execute the design I meditated. I felt nothing but the bare walls.

'Well, this is enough,' thought I, straightening myself against the cold stone; 'a man with the wish to die need not be particular about the means.'

Save the faint line of light on the pavement to my right that marked the position of the door, I could see nothing: all was black. But I knew that in the darkness before me there was a stone wall. I set one foot forward, lowered my head, and, with every muscle strained, I dashed forward.

I remember awaking in a state of bewilderment. There was light reflected on the ceiling. I lay on my back; it was not the plank bed of my cell. A voice, speaking in a low tone, broke the silence:

'If he hadn't a' tripped over his stool, he'd a' done it, sir.'

'Not he,' replied another voice sharply. 'Fractured skull—concussion of the brain—that's all they can get by that trick. He's moving; give me that bottle. Have you sent to the governor?'

Then I recollected what I had attempted, and knew that I had failed.

I was kept in the infirmary for the rest of the night. In the morning, with my head bandaged—for, despite the stool, I had struck the wall with sufficient force to give myself a gaping wound—I was taken before the governor.

'You're beginning badly,' he said sternly —'giving trouble already. I told you how it would be if you did not realize your position.'

'I have realized my position. I was condemned to death. It was by no act or wish

of mine that my sentence was altered. I have a right to die.'

'Don't answer till you're permitted to do so. Right to die, indeed! Not here. No man has a right to die, save by the decree of God or his fellow-creatures. I told you that the teaching of this prison was to show men the folly of doing wrong. Of a hundred attempts at suicide, not one is successful. You may try to kill yourself a hundred times, and then you won't succeed. You will be cured of the desire before you have made half a dozen attempts. Punishment is all you will get by them. In a first case of this kind there are extenuating circumstances—a man hasn't realized his position; but in a second the only mercy to be shown is severity. I warn you that the punishments are heavy: you may have to lie on your plank bed for the whole term of your confinement here—nine months. You may have to wear

chains day and night. You may even be flogged.'

He continued to speak, but his words gradually became unintelligible to me. As I looked at him he seemed to swim backwards and forwards. A dim idea possessed me that he was dead and washing in and out upon the seashore. With that I felt a frenzied sense of injustice done upon myself, and when he ceased to speak I strove to reply without knowing what it was I struggled to say. My mouth was pasty; my throat dry. I was like a drunken man trying to speak coherently.

The warders hurried me away. I remember wondering why all the walls had been coloured. I saw them as if I were looking through blood. I felt miserably sick and cold. On the corridor steps, I am told, I fell down; and the warders, thinking I was about to attempt suicide again, gripped me, but as

my head fell back they saw foam oozing from my clenched teeth.

They carried me back to the infirmary, and there for six weeks I lay with brain-fever. For a time I was delirious. When consciousness came back I found myself too feeble even to lift a spoon to my mouth.

'I am a child,' I said to the surgeon, when he asked how I felt. 'That's how it should be for one beginning a new existence.'

'I dare say it is, my man,' he said kindly. 'Good thing for you if you could forget that you ever had any other.'

I repeated these words again and again, having nothing to do but to brood, and being too feeble to form new ideas for myself.

The notion took hold of me strangely. I took the surgeon's words for my text every morning, saying to myself: 'It will be a good thing for you, Kit Wyndham, if you can forget that you were ever anything better than a

convict;' and all day long I considered how I might make this good thing a reality. At length I saw my way to it, as I thought, and when the governor, looking in the same afternoon, asked me if I had realized my position yet, I replied:

'Yes, sir; I think I see it now.'

The next day the chaplain, coming to my bedside, said:

'Well, Wyndham——'

I stopped him.

'I want to be called 365, sir,' said I; 'that's my number.'

'I know it is; but most of you poor fellows like to hear your name now and then.'

'I never wish to hear mine again. I want to believe that I was never anything but 365.'

'Oh, well,' said he, smiling. And then, 'Now, what can I do for you, 365?'

'I won't trouble you for anything to-day, sir. I am very comfortable.'

'Come, something desirable must occur to you as you lie here hour after hour.'

'No, sir. I should like to feel a little stronger: that's all.'

I turned my head not to see his eyes, that were looking at me with pity in them.

'It isn't time yet, I know, but I dare say I can manage it,' he said reflectively. Then, laying his hand on my shoulder: 'Shall I get permission for you to see a friend?'

I kept my eyes turned away, and fixed my mind stubbornly on my purpose as I replied:

'I have no friends, sir!'

'Surely one?' he said tenderly.

I shook my head in silence, not daring to speak, lest my resolution might give way.

He was silent for a minute; then he spoke:

'I was going to offer to write a letter for you; this was found in your cell.'

He held a sheet of prison letter paper before me. There were but three words on it: 'My beloved wife.'

I drew the bedclothes over my head.

After a little he spoke to me again softly.

'Won't you see that beloved wife, Wyndham?'

Mastering my feelings, and strenuously earnest in carrying out the line of conduct which alone could make the future endurable to me, I answered him presently.

'Wyndham is dead,' said I: 'dead as if he had gone to the gallows to which he was condemned. I am born to a new life. I must feel that—think only of that; never of the past, or I shall go mad. The prison is my world. I was born in it; I must live in it; I must die in it. To keep my reason I must believe that there is nothing beyond my prison

—no better life till I quit it. If friends come, I will not know them; if letters are sent to me, I will not open them. For pity's sake, don't try to make me believe I am like you.'

'I must remind you of one thing you seem to have overlooked: your wife——'

'Do you think I have not thought of her?' I cried, trembling violently. 'Ask the surgeon what will become of the patient whose wound is uncovered and probed and never allowed to heal. If forgetfulness is necessary to me it is necessary to her.'

'But what will your friends think of your silence?'

'What they will. If they think me forgetful, heartless, callous, so much the better. The worse I am, the less they will regret my fate.'

'Well, well. I shall say no more to-day about the letter.'

'Wait,' said I. 'You shall write a letter

for me, if you will. Write to Major Cleveden —write the name now, not to forget it.'

'Very good; there is the name,' he said, writing; 'the address I shall find in the Directory. Now, what shall I say?'

'Write him word for word what I have said to you, and tell him I shall count him quit of the old score if he helps me and others to forget that ever there existed such a man as Kit Wyndham.'

'I will write that at some future time—when you are stronger—if you wish it. Not to-day.'

'Yes, to-day, if you have any kindness for me. Think me a madman if you will, but humour me as you would a madman. Let this be the last word we ever speak on the subject. I will not listen to you if ever you refer to it again.'

My resolution was put to one more trial. The same day the governor came to me; his

face was all kindness, though he assumed his most decisive manner.

'The chaplain has been telling me about your interview,' he said. 'I don't intend to meddle with an affair that concerns him more than it does me, and you more than either of us. But now the matter is in discussion it's best to settle it, and as you seem a bit stronger, I know no reason for not doing so. Some letters have come for you—come before it was thought advisable by the surgeon to let you see them. I have opened them in accordance with the rules. Here they are.'

He held them out. I saw but the writing on one. It was my wife's hand. For a moment I looked at it, detecting in the writing, as I thought, something of the emotion with which the address was written. In that moment the fiercest desire contended with what I thought was my duty, and then consideration for her happiness—I say it not

to glorify myself, for I was in the wrong—turned the balance.

'No, sir,' said I, putting them back with my trembling hand; 'they are not for me. I have no wife—no friends. My name is not Wyndham. I am only a number.'

'Then I am to send them back, with an observation embodying what you say?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Very good, my man,' he said, with a sigh in his voice. 'I don't blame you,' and, turning away, he added something in an undertone that sounded like his oft-repeated phrase: 'realize the position.'

CHAPTER XIV.

I PASS OUT OF RECOGNITION.

When I was strong enough to leave the infirmary I was put to light work. But I remained feeble, and though I did my best to complete the allotted task for the day, I frequently failed from sheer physical inability. Seeing that I was in a bad way, the governor had me removed in June—before the specified time—to Dartmoor, where convicts in weak health were at that time drafted. I was chained between a villainous-looking burglar, who had been shot through the leg, and still limped, and a thin, consumptive young man, convicted of forgery. We were the centre of attraction, as we stood on the platform at

Exeter, waiting for the train to take us on to Tavistock. The burglar stared those out of countenance who looked at him, and with a grin nodded familiarly to the policeman who came to disperse the throng about us. The forger felt his shameful position keenly, being, I think, a man of good education.

'This is an unnecessary cruelty,' he said to the warder who had charge of us. 'We ought not to be exposed to observation in this way.'

The warder made no reply.

'What does it matter?' said I; 'these people are no more in our world than if they lived in the moon.'

Indeed, I believe I was more truly indifferent to what these people thought about us than the burglar himself, with all his show of effrontery.

My resolution to cut myself off entirely from the outer world and all its associations

had not wavered from the day I took it. I had fostered it day by day, and obtained such mastery over my thoughts by constant practice that I could without effort divert them into another channel when I felt they were leading me to the past. I looked upon this growing apathy as a blessing of Providence. It had enabled me, almost without a pang, to refuse to see the friends who came to see me at Pentonville—to abstain even from inquiring who the friends were. The chaplain and surgeon regarded it as a form of mania; it may have been the result of physical disorganization, for I have observed a similar perversity in the case of patients in the last stage of decline. No matter what it was, I felt sure then, and I feel sure now, that it saved me from losing my reason altogether or making a further attempt to destroy myself.

At Dartmoor, after I had gone through the customary examination, the governor,

looking at the paper on the desk before him, said:

'I see you were a cabinet-maker; you had better go into the carpenter's shop.'

'If you please, sir,' said I, 'I would rather do anything than that.'

'Why? Didn't you like your trade?' he asked, looking up in suspicion.

'I don't want to do anything that may remind me of what is gone.'

The deputy-governor, who stood beside the governor, bent down, pointing to a note, and saying something in a low voice.

'Oh, I see,' said the governor; and, having read the note, he asked me if I should like to be employed with the agricultural gang.

'Yes, sir, if you please,' said I.

'And do you still adhere to the decision I find noted here, of holding no communication with your friends and relations?'

'Yes, sir; it will be a kindness if you never

let me know that a letter has been sent to me or a friend come to see me. There will be nothing then to unsettle me.'

'Very good. If you change your mind—as I dare say you will when you get stronger—you can let me know.'

And now I began that life which went on without interruption for three years. There is no need to describe it. Sometimes the moor was wrapped in mist; sometimes it was covered with snow. At one time it was swept with fierce rain; at another the sun shone upon it bright and warm. There was nothing else to diversify the existence. The work of one week was like that of the last. From month to month we moved onward with mechanical precision. Such a life tends to confirm a man's habits, and my mind did not change.

On the whole, my life was neither better nor worse than that of a beast of burden. I

was taken out in the morning, worked to the full extent of my physical capacity, led back at sunset, fed sufficiently to keep me in working condition, and decently stabled at night. It was the life of the rest. We were supposed not to talk; and, but for the books given me to read and a word or two now and then from the governor and chaplain, we might have forgotten that we were men. My normal condition was one of apathy.

But from time to time I got a reminder of my better nature which I could well have spared. When the weather was bad and the ground heavy, it would happen that after my tea I was too fatigued and done up to fix my attention entirely on the book before me. Then, sitting alone in my cell, in the silence of night, with the dim light showing my crouched body on the white wall like the shadow of a Giant Despair, I would suddenly be overwhelmed with a stifling sense of deso-

lation and loss; it came like a great wave of misery that must exhaust itself before it left me once more a firm footing. I was powerless; no effort of will could maintain me against that rush of feeling. I could overcome the temptation to look back for an instant on past happiness; but I could not prevent feeling that I loved still and yearned in vain for her who had gone out of my arms for ever.

One day it occurred to me to see what I was like. It was nearly four years since I had looked at myself in a glass. I filled my tin pan with water and set it on the floor of my cell, where it reflected the corrugated iron roof overhead; then I knelt down and looked into it. For a truth, I did not know myself! For a moment I doubted if it was really my own face that I saw, and then I conceived that by some peculiarity of position or light my image was distorted. I shifted the pan,

and, when the water was properly still, bent over it again. No, it was no optical delusion; my face was as I saw it: no longer full and boyish, with the unformed expression of an unfixed destiny, but long and old and stolid. It was like the work of an imperfect artist—a face that looked as if it had never laughed and never could laugh.

But I might have laughed now if I had not lost the habit of doing so, for there was enough to tickle one's sense of humour in the serious, dull look of the face I saw, with its scrubby growth of beard, cut as close as the barber's scissors would go; its two deep lines going down from the angles of the nostrils, and the deep furrow between the brows.

I was pleased, though, with this change. 'There's no going back with a face like that,' thought I; 'I can never be anything again but 365.'

Soon I had convincing proof that the

change in my appearance was not merely a fancy on my part.

One day, when we were standing in the exercise yard, undergoing the search which was made whenever we came in from the fields, a gang of five new prisoners was brought in. They were drawn up nearly opposite to us, while one of the warders ran back to speak to the governor. The arrival of a fresh batch of convicts was always an event in the prison—old hands looking eagerly for former friends and acquaintances, all hoping to learn from them some late tidings from the other world. Even I, who entertained no such hope, was stirred with a feeling of curiosity, such as one has when a net is drawn in to know what kind of fish have been hauled for the benefit of society. A grin of recognition was exchanged between two of the newcomers and men in our gang; two others looked about them with a blank,

scared expression—they had not been caught before ; the fifth cleaned his nails with a twig he had picked up, his head drawn back in the attitude of a man accustomed to the use of glasses, and his raised eyebrows giving a look of profound abstraction and indifference to his meagre face.

Despite his red-ringed stockings, his knicker-bockers, drab slop, and foraging cap, which were about as suited to him as the dress of a merry-andrew to a judge, and despite the stubble of gray hair that covered the lower part of his face, I knew that I had seen the man before. But when, having finished his nails, he dropped his eyebrow, holding his head a little on one side as if he were criticising the effect, or inwardly considering the advisability of a certain course, I had no doubt as to his identity. At the same moment that I recognised him, the man on my right hand said, in the undertone

which convicts use in communicating with one another:

'Well, if there ain't old Beeton, the s'licitor as got me off fust time I was lagged!'

Having finished with the twig and his reflections, Mr. Beeton folded his arms and cast his eyes along our rank. He never moved a muscle of his face, but from time to time there was just that twinkle in his expressive eyes with which a counsel, looking over a crowded court, replies to the glance of a learned brother. Such a twinkle he gave to the man on my right, but he passed over my face without a sign of recognition.

I had no wish to renew my acquaintance with him, and though we lodged in the same block and our eyes met frequently as we brushed past each other in the yard, he failed to identify me.

I have often since wondered whether it would have been better or worse if he had never discovered who I was. I leave it to others to judge by what follows.

CHAPTER XV.

RAISED FROM THE DEAD.

The inventive faculty which had led me in bygone days to model clay figures, and then to carve them in wood, revived in me as I regained health and strength. My determination to do nothing which should bring back the past to my contemplation prevented me from employing this faculty in artistic creation, and for a time I kept it in idle subjection, like a man holding his tongue for fear of saying something foolish; but the power to form ideas was alive within me, and sooner or later it was bound to find expression in some form or other.

I had found great comfort in a book on

physics that I got from the library. It took me out of myself, and gave a turn to my thoughts when they were in danger of wandering into vacancy. I have known the time when that idle wandering of the imagination was full of delight; but never in my prison. Many a night, for want of mental occupation, I have cried myself to sleep like a child for I *would* not think what. And so, as I say, that book on physics was a source of comfort to me.

Every evening I had it out, and when I came upon a new problem I would ask myself why it was worked out in that way and not in another. Then I set myself to solve the problem in that other fashion—a task that gave occupation to my brain in the dark waking hours after the lights were out. In this way I came to invent all sorts of things, from gases to planetary systems.

Mechanics afforded me the greatest interest,

for here I could give visible shape to my ideas. I had a slate and pencil, and with two splinters of wood that I brought in up my sleeves, an old screw found in the tool stores, and a darning-needle picked up outside the tailor's shop, I contrived to make a useful pair of compasses. With these I drew my mechanical contrivances—plan, elevation, and section—all to scale as if they were working drawings.

Our chaplain was an excellent man—the very best that could have held that position. One could believe that the reforming of men was his vocation, and not a mere trade, chosen for its pecuniary or social advantages. He had the clear sense to see that, before we could be converted to angels, we must be humanized, and he sought to humanize us by encouraging our better tendencies, and developing any taste that might lift us above the condition of torpid brutes.

'Well,' said he, one Sunday afternoon, as he seated himself on the stool in my cell, 'what is the last invention?'

'A lamp, sir,' said I, fetching my slate from the shelf. 'You see the light here is very poor and trying to the eyes'—there was no gas in prison No. 4 at that time—'and I've been thinking how it might be improved without expense or danger.'

'Why, this is a subject that interests me,' said he cheerfully, as he took the slate, 'for the girl has broken two chimneys in the week, and nearly set the house on fire last night; and it's a serious question whether I should not go to the expense of laying on gas.'

'You ought to get gas from petroleum as good as that from coal, and cheaper.'

'You shall show me how. Come, explain it all. What's this—Fig. 1?'

'That's a reservoir for the oil, six inches in diameter, with a convex bottom of burnished

tin or white enamelled iron to reflect the light, and fitted with a hemispherical glass below.'

'No fear of breaking that. How do you fix it? There's no foot.'

'No, sir; that would throw a shadow. For the same reason there is no burner or jet under the flame; the light starts in a spray from the circumference. I planned it to drop through a hole in the iron overhead; but it could be hung from a ceiling or hooked on a wall equally well.'

'I see. It looks promising. Now let us come to the section, for I've no idea how it's to work.'

I made my drawings clear to him. There is no need to repeat the explanation here. The invention is old now: my lamp has superseded the ordinary gas illumination on one of the Continental lines, and the system is sufficiently well known to those who interest themselves in such matters.

'It seems possible,' said the chaplain, when I had shown all. 'I don't see why it should not answer.'

'The only proof is a practical trial, and that is not practicable.'

'Why not? I should like to make the experiment. Will you let me have your slate?'

'Of course I will, sir; you know that.'

He nodded, shaking my hand kindly, and went away with my slate.

About three weeks later he came with more than usual animation in his genial face.

'It's a success: your lamp,' he said, rubbing his hands—'a brilliant success.'

We talked about it for some time. He told me he hoped to get the governor's permission to let me see it alight; then, growing grave, he seated himself on my stool, and said:

'Now, my good fellow, I want to speak to

you upon a subject that I have hitherto avoided in deference to your wishes.'

'There's no one I should be more loth to deny, sir,' I replied. 'I am sure you would not wish to speak about that'—I knew it was the past he meant—'unless you felt it was my duty to hear what you have to say.'

'It is your duty. Well, there, you must know that your lamp is worth a great deal of money. The manufacturer who has worked out your idea—a personal friend of mine, in whose integrity I have the utmost confidence—is prepared to patent it, and pay you a royalty on all that are sold. It would seem that money can be of no use to one in your position; but you and I know better—don't we?'

He took my hand and held it in his, speaking with touching earnestness. It was not responsive gratitude that shook my frame and thrilled me with an emotion impossible to ex-

press—not the thought of such kindness and delicacy being shown by a stainless man to a convicted criminal that awoke my heart from the torpor in which it had existed so long, driving the hot blood tingling through my veins, where for four years it had flowed sluggishly, never for one moment imparting a generous glow to my breast. It was the consciousness that I lived again, and had the power to spend my life in the service of that dear soul in the outer world to whom I was linked.

'Raised from the dead!' I cried, my spirit exalted almost to madness. 'Raised from the dead!'

But indeed even that did not express all I felt. For the dead are better than those who live only because they cannot die.

'I see I was not mistaken, 365,' said the chaplain. 'You know what to do with the money.'

'Yes, sir. It shall all go to my poor wife. I can talk about her now; I can think about her night and day now. I have had to drive her away from my thoughts all these years for fear I should go mad with the knowledge that I could not in any way alleviate the misfortune and suffering I have brought upon her. You can understand how a poor fellow feels in here, sir. Think what it would be, sir, if you had to keep the thought of heaven and God's mercy out of it for a day—think if you had to keep the place they filled a blank!'

Something of the frenzy I felt as I looked back upon the terrible struggle I had gone through must have been in my looks, for the chaplain stopped me with an admonishing gesture.

'That will do. No need to think of that now,' he said.

'No, sir, no; I won't make a fool of

myself.' Then I burst out crying to prove the contrary. 'If you knew how good and beautiful she was!' said I, between my sobs.

'Yes, I can believe that,' said he. 'Come, be a man.'

'Ay, sir, but I must be a child first.' I laughed hysterically like a girl; then, with a simplicity no less girlish as I strove to be calm, I continued: 'She is but twenty-two now, sir. Her face was like Clytie's; you have seen the bust. She can't have changed as I have. So sweet and gentle—yet bright, yet quick-witted, and lively and gay—then. We were married clandestinely, and then her father came home. A millionaire, they say he is; I was nothing but a poor cabinet-maker. He hasn't a good heart—a selfish man with a great desire to make a position in society. If he finds out my poor dear's secret he will make her life

unendurable, even if he does not send her away. And now she may be dependent for subsistence on her own resources. What can a girl, trained as she has been, do? It's difficult to those who have been brought up in hardship. Perhaps she may be dependent on the charity of friends—in terrible misery. That's why I dared not think of her; but I may now. This money will give her independence; that will be some relief to her, dear soul! And there's no reason to keep this a secret from you; I will tell you all.'

'Better not just yet, 365.'

'You can call me Wyndham now, sir, if you like. I am a man again.'

'Well, Wyndham, that is a great deal. But you must not let your hopes carry you too far My friend is too good a man of business to venture upon an undertaking without a tolerable assurance of commercial

success. Still, the result may be less remunerative than I have led you to expect.'

'What of that, sir? If I could only throw a bunch of violets in her path it would be something to live for.'

'Limit your hopes to that for the present. I will speak to the governor about this matter. I don't think he will object to you seeing my friend in the ordinary way, and hearing what he has to say about the lamp; at the same time, it may be contrary to the regulations of the prison, in which case you can entrust the affair to a personal friend. Individually I fear that my position will not allow me to do more than I have said. I think,' he added, rising, 'we shall do well to say no more upon this subject until the governor has considered it.'

'I understand you, sir,' said I. 'You shall not hear another word about it from

my lips until you give me permission to speak.'

* * * *

I shall never forget the joy of that day. It was impossible to sit still for two minutes together. I walked up and down my little cell with feverish haste, revolving in my mind all the inventions that had occurred to me, with a view to finding the best material for building up a fortune for her. I saw nothing clearly, for the host of ideas that chased each other.

'Never mind,' thought I; 'I shall calm down presently, and do good work; I can afford to do nothing this evening.'

Then I stretched my arms out, spreading and closing my fingers strenuously, as if feeling for some object on which to expend my overflowing energy.

I felt I must be doing something, after all; and so, impatient already of idleness, I sat

down to my book. How often had I buried myself in it that I might not think of her; now I could not follow out a sentence for thinking of her. Oh, I might take her back into my heart again! I might conjure her up before my eyes in the darkness! I was no longer a dead incubus, crushing the life out of her dear body, chilling the very blood in her heart. I could think of her future without that maddening sense of impotency. It was in my power now to lighten her burden, to smooth her path, to make life endurable to her.

What should I do, thought I, if our relative positions were reversed—if I were free and she a prisoner? Assuredly my heart would ache whenever I thought of her, and nothing in the world could console me for her loss; but I could find distraction in travelling abroad, in visiting the cities of Europe, and searching out all that was beautiful in

nature and art. What I might do she also could do if only she had an independent fortune.

'And that she shall have,' said I, shutting up the book and starting to my feet. 'It is in my power to give you that, dear Hebe!'

To be doing something practical I rolled up my bedding anew, polished my tin vessels, and dusted the cell from end to end. I had never seen my cell look so nice. I was in a humour to be pleased with anything, and unconsciously I fell singing snatches of songs I knew years and years ago. My own voice sounded strange to me after so long a silence; it seemed not less astonishing to the warder.

'What's the matter?' he asked, coming in as I was standing a little way from the shelf with my head on one side, admiring the effect of my neatly-folded blanket with

the bright tins on each side. 'What are you doing of?'

'I'm just looking round my cell and thinking how happy a man may be even in prison.'

'Is that all?' he asked, with a suspicious glance.

I really think I was losing my senses at this moment, when they were, as I may say, coming back to me.

I awoke in the morning with the old buoyant feeling of vigour and freshness; and though I had slept but a few hours of the night, I sprang up at once, and was dressed before the bell rang. It was as if not only life had come back to me, but youth with it. I could almost think myself back in my home at Feltenham with a half-finished panel in the workshop that promised to be a real masterpiece when it was done. When the time came to go down in the yard, I marched off with a springy step. My aspect must have

changed with this alteration in my feelings—perhaps a lost expression came back to my features—for that morning old Beeton, whom I met in the yard, recognised me. I noticed his brows meet in perplexity as he scanned my face, and then expand as he jerked his head. The gesture seemed to say, 'Oh, it's you, is it?' and I nodded with a grin in reply. I was no longer afraid to think of the past, or anxious to avoid recollection of the world outside.

Two or three days after that, a convict who was drafted into our gang from the road-mending set in which Beeton worked, getting alongside of me, said:

'Is your name Kit Wyndham, what's got put up for a job at Richmond?'

'Yes,' said I.

'Well, old Beeton told me to let you know as he wants to speak to you. He's got something to tell you about your wife.'

CHAPTER XVI.

BEETON'S TERRIBLE NEWS.

I was now tremulous with excitement to know what Beeton had to tell me. At times I quaked with apprehension lest the news should be bad. Her secret might have been found out; her father might have cut her off; she might be friendless and in want; but a still more terrible foreboding lay beyond these possibilities—a foreboding that I dared not whisper to myself, but which was still present in my mind. She might be dead! My hand trembles as I write the words, with a recollection of the terror than unnamed suspicion carried to my soul. At other times, and more frequently—for hope predominated

over fear—I anticipated better things. Hebe might have charged him with a message of love and comfort to deliver to me.

Again and again I tried to get near him in the exercise-yard, but all to no purpose, for though in the fields it was impossible to prevent communication between prisoners, the rule was rigidly enforced in the prison. There was no alternative but to wait until a favourable opportunity came. Meanwhile I was not idle.

In thinking about my lamp, it occurred to me that the expansive force developed by the flame in vaporizing the oil or spirit to give light might be employed as a motive power. If the force were thus got direct from the fuel, there would no longer be a necessity to use water as a medium. That would be an advantage, opening up boundless possibility in locomotion. Even aërial navigation might be made practicable with a powerful motor,

disencumbered of the weight of water necessary to produce steam by the old system. Gradually my notion took practicable shape upon my slate. Night after night I worked steadily on, devising, simplifying, improving, until at length I began to feel satisfied with the result. The cylinders of my engine I jacketed in the boiler itself to prevent loss of heat by radiation. The vapour, after producing the stroke, was carried off by the exhaust to the furnace, where, in combination with atmospheric air, it produced the heat requisite for the further development of vapour. The same governor I had designed for the lamp served to carry off the excess vapour to a condenser, whence it was returned in a liquid state to the boiler. By a diaphragm in the cylinder, and by enclosing every valve in the boiler itself, there was no possibility of the vapour escaping unused. Here, then, as I said to myself, was an engine

in which heat was converted into motion with the least possible waste, capable of being set in motion at once, throwing off neither smoke nor steam, and by its portability applicable to any purpose in which the ordinary steam-engine is employed.

I had carried my alterations to a point whence I could see nothing left to improve, when the chaplain came to tell me that the governor had acceded to his request, and that his friend had telegraphed to say that he would come to Princestown that evening, and see me next morning, according to the rules of the prison.

'I thought it advisable to let you know nothing until the last moment, in case of any hitch,' said the chaplain. 'The delay has given Mr. Renshaw time to consider the affair, and his coming proves that he is prepared to make terms with you.'

'I wish I knew how to thank you, sir,' I

began. 'But if you knew the light you have let in upon my darkened heart—the wonderful joy and happiness I have felt since you changed me from a hopeless, useless clod——'

'If I knew all that, I should need no better reward, hey? Well, I think I do know it,' he said, patting me on the shoulder, 'so we will say no more about it. What's this?'

He took up my slate to change the subject.

'Why, sir, that's something else for Mr. Renshaw, if he will have it.'

'He will have to enlarge his works if you go on in this way,' said he, smiling; 'is this another lamp?'

I told him all about my engine, and he listened attentively, sitting down and examining my drawings as I explained them.

'An engine without smoke or steam—that

ought to be taken up by the underground railways; they need it badly enough,' said he; 'and an engine lightened of water and fed from the nearest oil-shop should be acceptable to the fire brigade. That's good enough; your aërial navigators need not be pressed for the moment.'

I feared from his tone that he did not regard my new invention as capable of serious development; but he undeceived me on this point when he spoke again:

'I am not very good at mechanics—don't think that my perception goes beyond lamps; but my friend is an authority upon such matters, and I will show him your drawings, and do my best to explain them to-night. You will know the result when you see him to-morrow. In that way two birds may be killed with one stone, which is advisable, because it seems to be a moot point whether the governor is quite within his right in

according you permission to enter into business transactions of this kind.'

The next morning I was taken up to the visiting-room, and there brought face to face with Mr. Renshaw, a warder standing in the divided space between us. I trembled violently with excitement; it seemed hardly possible that my new-born hopes could be realized. He began to speak at once about my lamp. With my hand against my ear I leant forward, listening greedily, fearful of losing a word. He told me that, acting on the chaplain's authority, he had already protected my invention, and put specimens into the market.

'You think it will be a success?' I said, when he paused.

'Oh, that is beyond doubt,' he replied. 'Orders are already taken for a considerable number. A suburban tramway company are going to give it a trial; that will be an excel-

lent advertisement. Fifty are wanted for a hat factory in the North. The success, indeed, is so well assured that I am prepared to buy your invention right out at once. In your own interest, however, I should advise you to hold your patent and take a royalty on what are sold. I am prepared to give you a couple of hundred in advance if you need a sum for immediate use—further payments to be made at the half-yearly balancing of accounts.'

'Thank you, sir, for your advice,' said I eagerly. 'I accept the offer, of course. The two hundred pounds down I should like as soon as possible.'

'I will draw out the cheque to-morrow; you have only to let me know what I am to do with it.'

The question had never occurred to me how I was to convey the money to my wife. I had not even settled whether I should let

her know where the money came from. I did not know her address, or how I was to learn it.

'I will let you know where to send the cheque,' said I, after a little consideration. 'Meanwhile if you will take care of it for me——'

'Certainly, certainly. At the same time, if you can give me the name of any friend of yours who will enter into a legal agreement on your behalf——'

I told him I knew no one in whose honesty I could place greater trust than his, and that I should be quite content to leave the matter of payment entirely to his sense of justice.

'Very good,' said he; 'and now with regard to this new invention shown to me by the chaplain last night. Are you willing to place that in my hands to develop in the best way I can?'

'With all my heart, sir, if you think favourably of it.'

'I do think favourably of it—very favourably. Your engine has certain advantages over the ordinary gas-engine, which should lead to its employment where the other is impracticable. One can never answer beforehand for inventions of this kind; but if it meets one's expectations as well as your lamp has, there is reason to believe that your remuneration will be measured by thousands instead of hundreds.'

I hardly know how I went back to my cell: I was intoxicated with the achievement of success, and the prospect of still greater.

I was tempted that night to write to my wife and tell her all.

'Surely,' thought I, 'she will be glad to know of this change in me—glad to know that I am better, and not worse, than I was. Will it not lighten her heart to hear that I

have found happiness in a prison, just as it would rejoice me to learn that she also had found some such source of joy ?'

To be sure, my long silence, my refusal to accept letters or hold communication with her, might have produced the effect I desired when I resolved upon that line of conduct. And if her heart under such treatment had grown callous, and she had become indifferent to my condition, was it kind or generous to soften that heart again, and revive a hopeless affection in her dear bosom ? But my own feeling told me that her heart was not hardened, and that as long as we lived she must think of me with a mournful longing for some return of her love—if it were only a written word. These healthier and more natural feelings overcame in the end the morbid sentiments I had fostered—one being just as much the result of a new condition as the other. And I wrote my letter, letting my pen go as my

heart dictated, and altering nothing that it occurred to me to say.

When I had written my letter and read it through, I was glad, and lay down to sleep with a feeling that I had done right. She will cry over my letter, thought I, just as I should break down if she wrote to me; but she will be happier afterwards. Those who neither weep nor smile are not the happier, as I knew well enough.

Now how was I to send my letter to her? That perplexed me terribly. To send it through Mr. Northcote after four years of silence would inevitably arouse the suspicion of the Vicar's wife, perhaps provoking a discussion which would involve Hebe in new difficulties. It seemed wiser to enclose it in a letter to the Major, asking him to forward it privately; but I did not know what address to send it to. However, it was pretty certain that my friend the chaplain would help me;

so I kept back the letter, with the hope that I should see him in the course of the day.

That afternoon it rained so heavily that the outdoor gangs were kept in, and put to work about the prison. I, with some more hands, was told off to limewhite the washhouse. A brush and a bucket of whitewash were given to me, and I was sent off to help do the passage leading to the baths. Some men were already at it ; the wall was marked off into portions, each being the task for one man.

'Number 5's your lot,' said the warder.

I set down my bucket and turned up my sleeves. While I was about this, I cast a glance at my neighbours.

To my delight I perceived that the man next to me was old Beeton.

'I can get the Major's address from him, and hear what he has to tell me about Hebe as well, maybe,' thought I.

We went each to our buckets for a dip of whitewash at the same moment. He gave me an unmistakable wink, and, taking himself to the further side of his division, began to paint the wall with the air of an artist born to the trade.

'If he really wanted to speak to me he wouldn't get as far as possible away,' thought I, as I drew my pail close to his division.

A jerk of his eyebrows bade me go further away. I saw his design. By both beginning at the further extremity we must in the end work up side by side, without fear of being put back by a suspicious warder. I shifted my position and carried out my part of this manœuvre. As we got through our work we drew nearer to each other, and before long got within whispering distance. I was the first to begin.

'What is Major Cleveden's address?' I asked.

'Why do you want to know?'

'Want to send a letter through him to my wife.'

He took a slap at the wall with his brush, and, coming back, asked:

'What are you writing to her about?'

'Sending her some money.'

Again he took a slap at the wall; it seemed to be the irresistible impulse of one who could not otherwise give expression to a feeling; and his puckered face showed that it was one of amusement.

'Why don't you answer?' I whispered angrily, when I got the chance; 'what are you grinning at?'

'You are such a confounded fool!' he replied, with another slap, wagging his wicked old head from side to side.

I let him reopen the dialogue.

'Playing into their hands from the first!' he whispered; 'I warned you. I knew that

Major, and the game he was playing; and I saw through her game, too.'

'What do you mean?' I gasped.

'Mean? Why, the Major and your wife were publicly married three weeks after they got you away for life, and they've been living together ever since!'

CHAPTER XVII.

A REVELATION.

When I first heard from old Beeton's lips that my wife and the man who professed to be my friend had combined together to cast me, an innocent man, into prison for ever, in order that they might live together without reproach under the cloak of a bigamous marriage—I could not believe it. It was too terrible to be true. I thought it must be one of those hideous jokes which convicts play upon each other to gratify their brutalized sense of humour.

The fiendish grin upon the old man's face as he leered sidelong at me to mark the effect his information made supported the suspicion.

He could not be in earnest: that must have been my impression. I can find no other excuse for not strangling the wretch while the words were fresh upon his lips.

'Mix your whitewash,' he whispered, seeing that my attitude was likely to attract the attention of the warder.

I obeyed instinctively, bewilderment succeeding my first feeling of incredulity.

As I stirred the stuff in the bucket he proceeded with his border, using the brush delicately, and his head on one side as if he were engrossed in the work; he continued to speak in a low, expressionless tone that contrasted oddly with his emphatic words:

'I suspected how matters stood at the trial. I said to myself, "If that Major is not a fool, he's the greatest villain that ever disgraced the service." Those men are not over scrupulous where a common fellow is concerned—still less when there's a pretty

woman in the case. Divorce case reports show that. After the trial I was sure he meant to get rid of you. Wanted to persuade me to tell the whole truth in my memorial to the Home Secretary. Showed him as clear as day that such a course would get you *life* for a certainty. When he said that if *I* didn't tell all I knew *he* should, I knew he was not a fool, but a heartless designing villain. Every man I have spoken to on the subject coincides with me. Why, one need not have more intelligence than a ploughboy to see that with such a statement as that before him the Home Secretary had no option but to pass the most severe sentence, short of death, upon you. Get on with your white-washing.'

I began my border as well as my trembling hands would let me, while he, stirring the lime in his bucket, continued :

'I went down to Brighton and saw your

wife. I told her what the result would be if the Major persisted in the course he had threatened.'

'What did she say?' I gasped.

'Oh, she played her part well—almost deceived me. Feigned to be torn between conflicting doubts. When I hinted at unscrupulous dealing on the part of her friend, said she could trust him with her life.'

I remembered that she had used the same words to me.

'Said she knew he would do nothing without consulting her, and promised to prevent him from going further. Do you hear: *she promised to prevent his sending you to prison for life*. Your fate was in her hands from that moment. You stood to be saved: with a word she could destroy you—get rid of you for ever. Have a go at the pail.'

The sweat of a new agony dropped from my face into the bucket as I bent over it.

Beeton, slowly drawing his brush down the wall, continued :

'How she kept her promise you know. The day after the interview I received a letter from her, saying that she had entrusted the further conduct of your case to the hands of Major Cleveden, who would discharge all obligations for the service I had rendered. I thought I saw how matters stood with her—thought I knew all : I didn't know half. A woman's a match for all the cunning in the Old Bailey. Go further off : the warder's coming down.'

I did as he bade me, but with eager impatience to draw near and hear more. Was I a villain to lend so ready an ear to the defamation of the woman I profess to have loved ? It's not unlikely ! I had herded long enough with villains to be infected with their vices. I have known men, without that excuse, who have lost all manly self-

control when jealousy maddened them with its venomous fang.

'I thought *she* was innocent, at any rate,' recommenced Beeton when we again got within whispering distance. 'Put it this way: there are stories against me; the Major has learnt 'em; has told the girl I am not to be trusted; made a plausible representation that no harm can come of telling the truth, and so persuaded her against my better counsel. In his eyes the honour of this rich family is of much more value than the life of a poor beggar who can't earn his salt. If he comes out tainted with twenty years of penal servitude, no better than the blackguards he's been coupled to, he will blast this girl's future, estrange her from her family, degrade her for ever in the opinion of society. He may not live twenty years, this poor wretch: hang himself, or go mad very likely; at any rate, he can't last much over the twenty

years, which is the least he can get. Then why for a few years of liberty, which he is most likely to abuse, should he for ever ruin this young woman and her family? That's how I put it: the best way I could for both of them *before* I knew all. Keep on: the warder's looking.'

'What are you about?' asked the warder, coming up, and looking at my work. 'You're layin' it on an inch thick here, and look at the mess you've made on the floor. This ain't like you. What's the matter—feel a bit queer?' he asked kindly, catching sight of my face.

'I felt a little upset, sir,' I replied. 'It's the smell of the lime, perhaps.'

'You can knock off if you like.'

'No,' said I quickly, fearing to lose the opportunity of hearing more, with the mad craving of a man for the poison that he knows must undo him.

'Shall I give him a hand, sir, when I've done this bit?' asked Beeton.

The warder nodded and moved on. They frequently wink at transgression of rules by men who give no trouble, and I was the model convict of the prison.

It was possible now for Beeton to communicate with me more freely.

'That's how I regarded them,' he went on leniently; 'and when the Major paid my bill I made no reference to the past, and resolved to let the matter drop. I had done the best I could for you, and got my money for it. But three weeks afterwards I learnt by accident that Major Cleveden and "Miss Hebe Thane" had been married at Brighton. Then I saw that they had done me thoroughly with their pretence of honesty and compassion: that from the first they had schemed to turn an accident to their own advantage, and had cunningly contrived to

get you buried in here, where you were powerless for evermore to touch them. That nettled me. I don't like to be done. I had never suspected the possibility of their being lovers, or I should have seen through the whole thing from the beginning. You gave me no hint. I suppose they kept you in the dark, too—deceived and hoodwinked you as they did me. You never had any suspicion of anything of this sort.'

I remembered vividly how the suspicion had crossed my mind at the very moment I heard the Major's name mentioned by my wife. Why had I suspected? To my disordered reason it appeared that something in the tone of her voice must have betrayed a secret feeling for him.

Beeton repeated the question, observing my silence. I shook my head.

'I'm glad you didn't,' he muttered. 'Shouldn't like to think I was the only man

that clever young woman had deceived. I smart now when I think of it; it's a reflection on my sagacity. I smarted still more keenly then; however, I resolved to be paid for it. I wrote to the Major, and told him I should feel it my duty, as your late adviser and an honest man'—the old fellow said this with a sardonic grin—'to proclaim his late marriage with a young lady calling herself "Hebe Thane" bigamous, unless he could give me a satisfactory explanation. The meaning of that hint was clear enough: a satisfactory explanation was a good round sum down as hush-money. It's no good pleading innocence here. I'm in for embezzlement, and if I had not been a sharp one I should have been here ages ago. Well, the Major's answer to that letter was not satisfactory. He told me I was at liberty to take any legal proceedings on your behalf that I should find justified by a record of your marriage, but

that if I ventured to take proceedings of any other sort, the only satisfaction I should be likely to get would be a thrashing. That didn't allay my irritation. Off I went to Somerset House at once to overhaul the register of marriages. And there, to my mortal chagrin, I found no record of marriage between any individuals bearing your name or hers. Then I perceived that you were not married.' He paused and glanced at me keenly. 'Or,' he continued, rightly drawing his conclusion from the expression of my face, 'or that you had been married before a registrar under other names to escape the possibility of your marriage being discovered by her friends. That is the case?'

I made no reply.

'Of course such a marriage, although subjecting you to punishment, is perfectly binding.' He paused again, tempting me to confirm his conclusion.

'Were they married—that's the question?' I asked, struggling for breath to form the words.

'No doubt about that. There are their names in the register at Somerset House for any man to see—unless,' he added with malicious significance, 'he is shut up in a prison. Who knew of your marriage? Who were the witnesses?'

I shook my head vaguely, and with an impatient gesture.

'I understand,' he murmured, chuckling. 'I've done it myself in my young days when I was a registrar's clerk, and more than one guinea I've got by it. You went to the office and told the clerk your position frankly. He told you what to do, found the witnesses, and married you under false names.'

He had divined the truth exactly, but that was nothing to me then.

'I can bear this no longer,' I muttered hoarsely. 'Tell me all, and be done with it.'

'She knew all about it. She knew that the only one who could betray the secret was this clerk, who could not speak without betraying himself, which he was not likely to do. And you may be sure she convinced the Major of his safety before he took a plunge like that. I was too mad to perceive that they were more cunning than I. I went to their house and saw the Major personally. The villain drew me out with his cool, impassive manner. He led me on to state the very sum I required as the price of secrecy, and then'—the old convict paused as he drew his brush on the edge of the pail, and added—'then he committed a breach of the peace, and laid himself open to an action for assault and battery, which he knew it would have ruined me to have brought against him.'

'She married him—she—Hebe?' was all I could get out.

'How else could they live together and keep up a decent pretence to respectability, you fool? You'd have known it four years ago if you hadn't sent my letters back.'

Our conversation was not connected and continuous as I have written it, but fragmentary, and broken up by the necessity of eluding the warder's vigilance. As the bell rang for cessation of work, Beeton concluded hurriedly, as we cleaned our brushes side by side:

'I've more to tell you. I'll get into your gang before long, and we'll contrive means to pay them out. Keep quiet. Let no one guess what you know. We'll be revenged on 'em: you on that fiend your wife; I on that cunning scoundrel the Major. Oh, we shall cry quits before long!'

END OF VOL. I.

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